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Who's the Fairest of Them All? Defining and Subverting the Female Beauty Ideal in Fairy Tale Narratives and Films through Grotesque Aesthetics

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Graduate Program in Comparative Literature
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts
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WHO'S THE FAIREST OF THEM ALL? DEFINING AND SUBVERTING THE
FEMALE BEAUTY IDEAL IN FAIRY TALE NARRATIVES AND FILMS THROUGH
GROTESQUE AESTHETICS

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Leah Persaud

Graduate Program in Comparative Literature

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
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Abstract

This thesis seeks to explore the ways in which women and beauty are depicted in the fairy tales of Giambattista Basile, the Grimm Brothers, and 21st century fairy tale films. A dominant beauty ideal in the genre has established a splitting of female characters into strict dichotomies that reinforce beauty and good moral behaviour while also propagating antagonistic female relationships. The use of spectacle to highlight the physical rewards of beauty and the violent punishments of ugly women have created a stable pattern in the genre that is maintained regardless of time period or context. It is the aim of this thesis to pursue an aesthetic approach to the tales that focuses on the beauty ideal, anxiety, spectacle, and the grotesque, to explore the ways in which this seemingly static genre has been able to challenge the impossible ideals of beauty it overtly emphasizes.

Keywords

Fairy tale, beauty ideal, grotesque, spectacle, anxiety, Giambattista Basile, Wilhelm Grimm, Jacob Grimm, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, fairy tale film

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Introduction

“For all their rich variety, fairy tales have a remarkably stable—and therefore predictable—structure” (Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales* xxviii)

Introducing the Issues

The fairy tale genre is generally a static, unchanging one. Vladimir Propp in *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (1994) identifies thirty-one functions, or plot actions, that are present in almost all fairy tales, and even the seven dramatis personae he focuses on are found in some form in all of the tales. Part of the appeal of the fairy tale is this static nature, because it follows a set, well-known formula. Hearing variations of the same story produces a very particular pleasure in the reader, who recognizes the story and yet still enjoys hearing it over and over again. The association between being good and being beautiful is an element of the fairy tale that is often present, even in tales that do not aim at any didactic purpose. Nancy Canepa points out in “Ogres and Fools: On the Cultural Margins of the Seicento” (2001) that “it is characteristic of folk- and fairy tales, too, to present absolute aesthetic and ethical categories: the characters that populate their worlds are either beautiful or ugly, good or bad” (223). This basic association is so characteristic of the genre that it can be argued that it is part of what defines the fairy tale and separates it from other genres. However, this dominant association between appearance and morality in female characters is problematic because it prioritizes male-female relationships while reinforcing the impossibility of developing female relationships, by establishing a negative narrative regarding women, vanity and power. Psychoanalytic scholarship has identified the dynamic between aging or ugly female characters and their young beautiful counterparts as a relationship built on the ugly/older woman’s own sense

of anxiety at the prospect of aging, suggesting that envy and even hatred towards the beautiful characters is, in a sense, only natural. In *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1977), Bruno Bettelheim argues, “[w]e do not know why the queen in “Snow White” cannot age gracefully and gain satisfaction from vicariously enjoying her daughter’s blooming into a lovely girl, but something must have happened in her past to make her vulnerable so that she hates the child she should love” (195). Labelling the source of the stepmother’s envy as the result of her own psychological problems fails to address the genre’s tendency to associate female beauty morally with goodness and socially with power and success. This legitimizes an antagonistic relationship between female characters that has become a problematic, seemingly static element of the genre.

It is the purpose of this thesis to add to the dialogue in scholarship surrounding issues of female representation and relationships in fairy tales, by addressing and challenging psychoanalytic scholarship through an aesthetic approach to the depiction of women that focuses on how envy, anxiety, and spectacle of the female body can be understood differently in the genre to allow for more positive female relationships. Through an analysis of 17th and 19th century written tales and 21st century films, it seeks to explore how the depictions of the female characters themselves shape the fairy tale world and emphasize physical beauty while discouraging the agency of the female character to morph and change her own body, for her own desires. By focusing on an aesthetic approach to the fairy tales that brings in elements of Mikhail Bakhtin’s grotesque two-bodied image, this thesis will ask why female bodies are made into a spectacle in tales from the 17th century up to present day, and it will explore how the

prevalence of the beauty ideal in relation to envy, anxiety, and the creation of spectacle, can challenge the dominant narrative regarding women, beauty and power in the genre.

I will look at three main questions in this thesis: How and why has the beauty ideal been reinforced to maintain an antagonistic relationship between female characters? How has psychoanalytic scholarship justified that antagonistic relationship, and is it possible to redefine the presence of anxiety and spectacle from an aesthetic lens to challenge what appear to be static elements of the tales? And finally, how can a combination of aesthetics and the grotesque in 21st century fairy tale films work to challenge traditional representations of women and female relationships? These questions can add to the present scholarship that explores issues regarding women in the genre by suggesting a different way to approach female relationships and portrayals, from an aesthetic perspective.

The Written Tales

The written tales have been selected from two collections of fairy tales: Giambattista Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti*, and the Grimm brothers' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812). Basile's tales were first published posthumously from 1634 to 1636, but it is likely that he read sections of it "to friends and in the Neapolitan academies" (Canepa, *From Court to Forest* 43). Nancy Canepa points out that "the preferred mode of consuming a work like *Lo cunto* was in an oral setting, in the context of courtly conversation" (45) and the tales draw heavily on the particular culture and language of Naples in the 17th century. Basile's tales are considered, along with Giovanni Francesco Straparola's *Le piacevoli notti*, one of the first collections of literary fairy tales. Originally written in Neapolitan dialect, they were later translated into standard

Italian by Benedetto Croce, and they offer some of the first written versions of well-known tales such as “Brier Rose,” “Snow White,” and “Cinderella.”

The collection of tales from the Grimm brothers began as a scholarly pursuit to “uncover the etymological and linguistic truths that bound the German people together” (Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm* 25), but based on public reception to their work they decided to edit the tales increasingly with an eye toward a younger audience (47). In the introduction to his translation of the Grimm tales, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, Zipes notes that the Grimms “saw the ‘childhood of humankind’ as embedded in customs that Germans had cultivated, and the tales were to serve as reminders of such rich, natural culture” (xxx). Similar to Basile’s tales, the Grimm tales also aimed to capture a particular culture and set of customs for the time period, but the similarities between the two sets of tales in relation to issues of female representation will point to a dominant characteristic of the fairy tale genre that has been present regardless of changes in time period or culture.

I have gone through the written tales of Basile and the Grimm brothers to identify a selection of tales that focus on competition and envy based on a beauty ideal in female characters. I focus on variants of “Snow White,” “Brier Rose,” and “Cinderella” in order to trace changes in the depictions of the beauty ideal, envy, anxiety and spectacle based on the specific typology of a tale and different variations of that tale. I also explore some less popular tale types that focus on issues of beauty and conflict, often in ways that are more violent than the well-known tales mentioned above. To counter my focus on specifically female relationships, such as those between (step) mother- (step) daughter and (step) sister-sister, I also include an analysis of tales from both Basile and the Grimm

brothers that depict male relationships regarding brother-brother interactions. These are the relationships that are most often shown in the tales, and my lack of discussion on stepfather-son or between stepbrother relationships is because there is not enough in the tales that explores these relationships in depth for it to be productive for this thesis.

The Films

The fairy tale in film offers a different medium through which traditional tales have been re-told and adapted for the screen. Since the 1937 release of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Walt Disney films have dominated the visual depiction of well-known fairy tales, often borrowing from the Grimm Brothers or Charles Perrault's *Histoires ou Contes du Temps Passé*, published in 1697. Although Disney largely borrowed from the written tales, the Walt Disney fairy tale follows its own set of plot elements and visual patterns that are distinct from the written tales, and have developed the film typology through which other fairy tale films have often followed. In *The Enchanted Screen* (2011) Jack Zipes points out that together with a group of artists, technicians and collaborators, Walt Disney “developed the animated feature fairy-tale in [his] name so that his productions effaced the names of Charles Perrault, the Brothers Grimm [...] and became synonymous with the term fairy tale” (17). Disney films have popularized the fairy tale as a visual, rather than a strictly written or oral medium, but have also reinforced the problematic associations between beauty and goodness characteristic of the written tales. This has maintained the antagonistic relationship between women in the genre, as well as envy and anxiety as dominant emotions among female characters. However, in the past eight years Disney and other filmmakers have begun to re-write these relationships by producing films that challenge the traditional dynamic between women in the genre. I

will look at a few Disney films to trace this change, particularly *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), and also the more recent *Maleficent* (2014).

In addition to the Disney films are films that deviate from that now popular pattern, and instead ridicule and parody the long-established themes and elements of not only the Disney films, but the genre itself. I have chosen a variety of live-action films from the last ten years that are based on older, well-known tales, often from the Grimm collection or Perrault, and which sometimes adhere to, and sometimes challenge the fairy tale elements that were reinforced in Disney films. *Mirror, Mirror* (2012), and *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012) are both based on “Snow White”; *Maleficent* (2014) is a re-creation and re-interpretation of the 1959 Disney film *Sleeping Beauty*, based on the version of the tale by Perrault; *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters* (2013) is based on the Grimm version of the tale, but is re-interpreted for a modern audience. My interest with these films is in exploring how the spectacle of the female body regarding beauty and ugliness in the written tales, is pushed further in the films, and whether those traditional ideals of beauty are challenged, maintained, or transformed in these modern interpretations of the tales.

The Role of Language

Because the fairy tale is such a static genre, language can play an important role in reinforcing or challenging basic elements of the typologies of the tales. The Benedetto Croce translation of Basile’s tales dates from 1925 and was one of the first translations from the Neapolitan dialect to the standard Italian (Canepa, *Giambattista Basile’s The Tale of Tales* 10). Croce’s edition was used as the main source for my analysis of the tales, which I then translated into English. However, I have also made use of Nancy

Canepa's translation of the 1634-36 *editio princeps* in Basile's original Neapolitan dialect to English. Canepa notes in the introduction to her translation of the tales that Croce, "certainly not naïve about the risks inherent in passing from one language to another—and a fellow Neapolitan to boot—tended to deal with difficult, or racy, passages by either simplification, elimination, or, above all, sanitation of the original" (29). Although I am not able to read the original Neapolitan dialect, a comparison between Canepa's translation of the original and Croce's translation into Italian can show how important language is in establishing a spectacle in narrative form. In Basile's tales his use of language is what sets him apart because the tales are filled with colloquialisms and references specific to Naples in the 17th century. Language shapes the tales and adds elements of the grotesque that relate to a Baroque anxiety regarding appearances and illusion that was characteristic of the time.

For the Grimm tales I am working from the 2002 English translation by Jack Zipes. Although I am working from an English translation, the difference in how language is used can still be explored based on a look at the straight-forward descriptions the Grimm's use, with language that is clearly aimed towards teaching lessons to its intended child audience. The difference in the written tales between the extended metaphors of Basile and the stark descriptions of the Grimms will show how important the use of language in the written tales is, in establishing the female body as a spectacle and presenting the potential to subvert the dominance of the beauty ideal.

The Hollywood English used in the films varies depending on the intended audience of the film and sometimes it very closely resembles the Grimm didactic language. Although the films do not use Basile's extended metaphors and playful turns of

phrase in the language, the visual medium and the depiction of violence indirectly refer back to Basile's grotesque physical descriptions. However, even with differences in language, the typologies of these tales do not change in the films without the use of the visual to challenge the dominant narratives of the genre. What ends up being more important in these tales is not the cultural differences exhibited through differing uses of language, but the aesthetic differences that emerge based on the physical reward and punishment of women. Socio-historic scholars of the fairy tale such as Jack Zipes, Nancy Canepa and Suzanne Magnanini have studied the tales in relation to the culture and time in which they were produced to explore how these elements have shaped the tales and made them very specific to their time period. However, by focusing on the basic typological elements that remain static regardless of time period or language I am able to trace a dominant portrayal of women that is present regardless of differences in language, pointing to a universal, problematic depiction of women and female relationships in the genre.

Overview of Current Scholarship

Fairy tale scholarship has moved, for the most part, in four major directions. Initial scholarship focused largely on the structure of the tales through formalistic and structural approaches. Antti Aarne established an index and classification system for the genre in *The Types of the Folktale*, originally published in 1910 and translated and further expanded by Stith Thompson in 1928, and then again in 1961. This work is and has remained foundational to identifying and defining the fairy tale with an index that categorizes the tales based on specific typological elements. The Aarne-Thompson classification system has provided a means of not only identifying the tales, but

recognizing key plot elements and motifs that characterize each tale. This has been instrumental to my own study of the tales, in which I reference the Aarne-Thompson typologies to identify characteristic elements of the tales involving female relationships and conflict to trace how different time periods and mediums have changed or maintained those plot elements.

Vladimir Propp's work in the *Morphology of the Folktale*, originally published in Russian in 1928 and first translated into English in 1958, builds partly off of the Aarne-Thompson index and works to identify the component parts that create the structure of the fairy tale. Propp identifies thirty-one functions, or actions, of the tale, and seven *dramatis personae*, that are present in various combinations in all tales. He argues that study of the tales should focus less on the characters and more on the functions, which are the "act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action" (21). Focusing on the form of the tale, Propp argues that the significance of characters lies in their actions, and not any wants, feelings, or intentions that may motivate them. His focus on action rather than character motivation emphasizes the form of the tales and is helpful in identifying key plot elements that are definitive of the genre.

Psychoanalytic and feminist scholarship on the fairy tale occupies roughly the same time period, and was dominant throughout the 1970s to late 1980s. The similar time period has to do in part with the constant dialogue between these two strains of research, especially in regards to the depiction of women and female relationships and the effects of those depictions on the reader of the tales. Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* (1977) was, and has remained, a central study of many well-known fairy

tales from a psychoanalytic perspective. Throughout this thesis I refer to Bettelheim's work because of his focus on the function of antagonistic female relationships in the genre. The psychoanalytic approach addresses how the fairy tale functions in relation to the child reader. Conflicts between mother and child are often explained as the means through which the child reader can healthily resolve oedipal conflicts that arise as the child grows older (69). This approach has been productive in many ways, but in some cases has also been problematic because of its justification of the antagonistic relationships between women in the tales.

Feminist scholarship also often focuses on the effects of the genre on the child reader, but more-so in relation to how women are depicted. In the early feminist scholarship on fairy tales from the 1970s, scholars such as Marcia Lieberman looked at the "effects of these representations on the gender identity and behaviour of children in particular," which gradually transitioned into a look at the effects on women in general (Haase, *Fairy Tales and Feminism* 2-3). I have chosen not to focus on feminist scholars in this thesis, instead referencing the psychoanalytic scholarship that feminist scholarship often works to challenge. However, I do recognize the dialogue that has been established through the interplay of feminist and psychoanalytic scholarship regarding depictions of women and the fairy tale.

From the 1990s to early 2000s another branch of fairy tale scholarship emerged focusing on a socio-historic approach to the tales by scholars such as Jack Zipes and Nancy Canepa. This approach explores the fairy tale as specific to the time and place in which it was written, pulling out elements that point to individual, defining traits that make the tales less universal and more specific to the context in which they emerged.

Jack Zipes has done an extensive amount of work on the Grimm Brothers and their tales, and Nancy Canepa has focused on the tales of Basile, also producing one of the best English translations of Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti*.

There has been little recent scholarship on fairy tale films, but in the past five years more scholarship has begun to emerge on this subject. Jack Zipes published *The Enchanted Screen* in 2011, which offers one of the few in-depth explorations of the fairy tale genre in film. Zipes identifies the issues regarding telling a new tale versus retelling an 'original' and how that can be negotiated in film. He also points out how Disney has shaped the contemporary notion of the fairy tale, arguing that in "the world of global capitalism, children and adults are more apt to be familiar with cinematic versions of the fairy tale than they are with oral or printed ones" (22), marking the shift in the 21st century towards film adaptations of the tales over the written tales. Cristina Bacchilega's *Fairy Tales Transformed? Twenty-First Century Adaptations and the Politics of Wonder*, published in 2013 explores the issue of adaptation of fairy tales in the 21st century. Bacchilega argues that "recent fairy-tale films seem to thrive on blurring the boundaries of and raising questions about the relationship between fantasy and reality" (109). Susan Cahill's article "Through the Looking Glass: Fairy-Tale Cinema and the Spectacle of Femininity in "Stardust" and "The Brothers Grimm"" (2014) explores how the fairy tale films *Stardust* and *The Brothers Grimm* depict women, specifically in terms of negotiating the aging female body as spectacle (58), and has been helpful in exploring how female appearance and spectacle are approached in fairy tale films.

A Note on Defining the Genre

Vladimir Propp identifies the fairy tale from a formalistic perspective as tale types 300-749 in the Aarne Thompson typology, including tales that involve supernatural elements and magical objects (10). The thirty-one functions he identifies as present in all tales provide a basic frame on which every fairy tale is built. From an aesthetic perspective, Max Lüthi defines the fairy tale according to the conflict between beauty and ugliness which often pushes the plot forward, especially in tales involving female conflict. Basic actions involving a quest, a villain, a hero and beauty in addition to the presence of magic are staple characteristics of this genre. In addition, the fairy tale is a relatively static genre: regardless of time period or context, the basic elements of the tales do not change, even if the names, language, or setting do. The association between female beauty and morality is also a defining characteristic of the genre, and has in some ways been seen as a natural element of the tales. However, by exploring the function of appearance as it relates to women and female relationships I am attempting to explore whether this really is a stable, unchangeable element of the genre or whether, by visually challenging the dominant beauty ideal, the genre contains within itself the potential for female characters to take control of themselves and their appearance, to produce more complex and meaningful relationships between women.

My Approach

The approach of this thesis to the fairy tale involves a constant dialogue with psychoanalytic scholarship, especially the work of Bruno Bettelheim, but also largely draws on the Aarne-Thompson typology and the work of Max Lüthi, who explores the important role of aesthetics in the genre. I continuously go back to the psychoanalytic

approach to address the ways in which it has defined female relationships and interactions that problematizes the dominant representation of women in the genre, rather than justifying the presence of antagonism between women based on envy and anxiety. My aim is to pursue an aesthetic approach to the tales that focuses on appearance and violence in order to offer space through which the genre allows women to negotiate control of their own bodies. Focusing on these aesthetic elements will offer an interpretation of the genre that shows the ways in which, since the beginning of the literary fairy tale in the 17th century, there have been elements that have allowed female characters to challenge the boundaries placed on them by society's beliefs and ideals. Through the use of four key terms: the beauty ideal, anxiety, spectacle, and the grotesque, I will explore the problematic depiction of women and female relationships, and the ways in which it is possible to challenge the dominance of the beauty ideal by focusing on depictions of the female body.

The Beauty Ideal

The beauty ideal of the fairy tale refers to an ideal of beauty emerging from the Middle Ages, in which perfection and beauty in appearance were equated with an equally perfect and beautiful soul. In *History of Beauty* (2004) Umberto Eco points out that “even in the golden age of Greek art, Beauty was always associated with other values like ‘moderation,’ ‘harmony,’ and ‘symmetry’” (37). The association of beauty with other aspects is therefore not something that was created in the Middle Ages. Eco points out in *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages* (1986) that “[m]ost of the aesthetic issues that were discussed in the Middle Ages were inherited from Classical Antiquity. Christianity, however, conferred upon these issues a quite distinctive character” (4). It is this religious

association between physical appearance and moral standing that becomes a key element of the beauty ideal in the fairy tale. Lori Baker-Sperry and Liz Grauerholz define the feminine beauty ideal as “the socially constructed notion that physical attractiveness is one of women’s most important assets, and something all women should strive to achieve and maintain” (711). Because the possession of beauty in the fairy tale often signals the eventual success, wealth, and marriage of the beautiful woman, beauty becomes associated with power for women and is so strongly desired by ugly and aging women that they are constantly willing to resort to extreme and often violent means in order to achieve that beauty for themselves. Whether specifically detailed or outlined in general, beauty presents the highest standard of appearance in the fairy tale, one that is impossible to measure up to unless a woman is born with it, or magically gifted with it. As a result of this, the lack of beauty is a defining element in determining the envious and antagonistic relationships between women.

Anxiety

Anxiety presents itself in women as a worry or unease over a lack of beauty, or aging, and it stems from initial feelings of envy that then morph into anxiety. The initial seeds of envy are planted because of the benefits reaped upon the beautiful women, and this is the starting point in the destruction of any potentially healthy female relationships. Anxiety is exhibited often through a bodily response, creating an awareness of the female body and its reactions that draws even more attention to female appearance and temperament. Knowledge of the rewards that will be given to the beautiful women, combined with an awareness of the impossibility of gaining those same rewards either for a mother, or her daughter, are what create feelings of anxiety in women who recognize

their lack of beauty or their inability to achieve it. This same anxiety is not present in male characters, in which their wealth and future can depend on elements other than their physical appearance, making it a specifically female emotion in the fairy tale genre as it relates to beauty. Physical expressions of anxiety including agitation of the body, quickly beating hearts, nervous sweating and other factors indicate a woman's discomfort at her realization of the impossibility of attaining the beauty ideal, which further divides female relationships. The separation between perceived good and bad attributes into a mother and step-mother results in a natural hierarchy within fairy tales that reproduces these character types without allowing them to coexist peacefully, creating anxiety for those women who do not have access to the ideal beauty.

Spectacle

My intention with this term is to explore the visual depictions, both in the written tales and in the films, of the female body and the parts of the body that are dwelled on. Spectacle functions in this genre largely in relation to beauty and violence, and a combination of the two establishes a visual and written dialogue regarding beauty and consumption. The desire to possess or consume beauty is a trait that is often present in the ugly and aging women of the tales, and the ways in which this desire is translated into transformations and mutilations of the body to achieve or destroy the beauty ideal offers space in the genre to challenge the dominant beauty ideal. The ugly female body in the fairy tale is made into a spectacle as much, if not more than, the beautiful female body. Vera Sonja Maas argues that “in patriarchies, female bonding is difficult to achieve. The voice of the looking glass sets women against each other, and in their isolated position women remain individually helpless, thus contributing in some part to their position of

reduced power” (109). Maas identifies the dominant voice of the mirror as a means of maintaining a divide in female relationships in the genre, while also producing helpless women who have no power to challenge the beauty hierarchy of the tales. However, the very position of being a spectacle has with it a sense of empowerment. It is possible to reinterpret the position of these women as spectacle in order to establish how being a spectacle can instead become a source of power, rather than of subservience to a dominant ideal. The fairy tale films explore this powerful role of the woman as spectacle, and the dominance of violence and cruelty in female relationships can be redefined not as a struggle for male attention in a patriarchal world, but as an empowering fight between women to re-claim the control of their appearance in the genre.

The Grotesque

The grotesque as an aesthetic principle offers a way to challenge the beauty ideal through a focus on the body and exploring the limits of the body. In his discussion of grotesque imagery in the Renaissance, Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World* (1984) argues that the grotesque images “are ugly, monstrous, hideous from the point of view of ‘classic’ aesthetics, that is, the aesthetics of the ready-made and the completed” (25). In *Postcolonial and Feminist Grotesque* (2011) Maria Sofia Pimentel Biscaia points out that the enemy of the grotesque body is “the finished, closed classical body” (12). The contrast between the classical aesthetic of the closed off, perfect body, with the grotesque body which constantly moves beyond the boundaries of the classical ideal is one that is negotiated in the fairy tale through the relationship between the female protagonist, exemplifying the beauty ideal, and the antagonist, exemplifying the grotesque body.

According to Bakhtin, “grotesque imagery constructs what we might call a double body. In the endless chain of bodily life it retains the parts in which one link joins the other, in which the life of one body is born from the death of the preceding, older one” (318). Without the combination and transformation of life and death in this grotesque double body, there is only the single body which Bakhtin argues is “self-sufficient and speaks in its name alone” (322). In the fairy tale genre, quite often the study of how women are portrayed takes an approach to the female body as an isolated, self-contained image—especially in the case of the beautiful woman. However, the beautiful and ugly women of the tales are inextricably linked: when one succeeds the other fails, and as one enters new life, the other dies. Pimentel Biscaia argues that women can “use their gender and sexual specificity to construct other meanings. The female body thus becomes a text conveying semiotic revolution; it appropriates, manipulates and produces its own constructed meaning, that is, it is in control” (118). Exploring how the grotesque two-bodied image creates space in the genre to stop looking at women as two extreme opposites allows a more complicated understanding of the cyclic nature of female relationships, that often combines birth and death, cruelty and kindness, in a two-bodied exploration of insecurities and anxieties of women. Jeana Jorgensen points out in “Quantifying the Grimm Corpus: Transgressive and Transformative Bodies in the Grimms’ Fairy Tales” (2014) that “the grotesque descriptions of women’s bodies serve normative purposes,” listing the punishment of Cinderella’s stepsisters as one example (135). The grotesque can be understood to be didactic in this sense because it punishes the perceived ‘wrong’ actions of the stepsisters. However, the grotesque can also function to draw attention to ways in which the female body subverts the dominance of the beauty

ideal in order to establish a different way of approaching women and beauty in the genre that does not prioritize antagonistic relationships between women.

Chapter One

Chapter One introduces the beauty ideal in the fairy tale genre and explores the ways in which, from a historical, typological, and psychoanalytic approach, beauty has been established as a permanent motif of the fairy tale. The first section explores historical reasons for the presence of the beauty ideal and the maintenance of the stepmother as evil by looking at the medieval mentality in regards to beauty and morality, and the ways in which the tales have affirmed this divide by rewarding beauty and punishing ugliness. Archetypes and the typology of the tale also play a role in perpetuating the presence of the beauty ideal, and the second section of the chapter looks at how the typologies of the tales reinforce beauty as the source of conflict in female relationships. The end of this chapter addresses psychoanalytic scholarship and its problematic justification of splitting women, primarily mother figures, into two extremes of good and evil.

Chapter Two

Chapter two seeks to challenge the dominance of the beauty ideal in the genre by exploring how bodily expressions of anxiety and the two-bodied grotesque image can redefine female relationships within the genre. By identifying the source of anxiety as a loss of power that is equated with ugliness, rather than an anxiety over a lack of beauty, this chapter works to establish where there is space within the fairy tale to challenge the beauty ideal and its maintenance of negative female relationships. Addressing the

purpose of the split between good and bad women from an aesthetic rather than a moral perspective raises questions about why that splitting occurs, and how it is possible to challenge that splitting through the use of the grotesque, to create more complex depictions of women and female relationships that do not rely on antagonism and hatred.

Chapter Three

The purpose of this chapter is to focus entirely on an aesthetic approach in order to explore the ways in which fairy tale films have visually begun to challenge the traditional depictions and relationships of women, while still referencing the dominant association between appearance and morality. By focusing on agency, the gaze, and the use of colour as it relates to spectacle, the goal of this chapter is to show how an aesthetic approach to the fairy tale genre can begin to challenge and re-write elements of the tales that, for a long time, seemed static and fixed.

Chapter 1

1 How History, Typology and Psychoanalytic Scholarship Have Maintained the Beauty Ideal as a Dominant Presence in Female Relationships in Fairy Tales

How many I've seen go this way, daughters, stepdaughters, whatever - some just turn up at my door, I'm never quite sure whose they are or where they come from - but I know where they go: to be drowned, hung, stoned, beheaded, burned at the stake, impaled, torn apart, shot, put to the sword, boiled in oil, dragged down the street in barrels studded on the inside with nails or nailed into barrels with holes drilled in them and rolled into the river. (Coover 1)

The above quote from Robert Coover's postmodern fairy tale novel *Stepmother* (2004) speaks to the cyclic nature of female relationships in fairy tales, in which the evil and ugly women of the tales are tortured, injured, and harassed, not just by the men they have tricked, but also by the good, beautiful women who they themselves have hurt. In the fairy tales by Giambattista Basile and Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm that specifically deal with female conflict, envy is primarily the driving emotion behind the conflict in regards to the pursuit of marriage, the desire for power, and the possession of beauty. This is not to say that envy only emerges in tales between women, because it shows itself just as explicitly in tales of male competition, usually regarding the pursuit of greater wealth, a beautiful wife, or achieving greater success than the man's brother or peers. The difference between the two types of competition is that for women, envy is most often fuelled by the unspoken beauty ideal that is present in the fairy tales, which rewards the beautiful women simply for being beautiful, while punishing their ugly counterparts because of their hideous appearance. In her essay "Who's Wicked Now? The Stepmother as Fairy-Tale Heroine" (2010) Christy Williams makes an acute observation about the dynamic between fairy tale heroines and their evil stepmothers:

[t]hese fairy-tale patterns—perpetuated by the reproduction of a fairy-tale “canon” contrived from a few select stories from Charles Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, and solidified by Walt Disney—are so pervasive that they dominate the possibilities for fairy tales in Western popular culture and do not allow other stories to take root. (257)

Williams points out the dominant fairy tale pattern that pervades popular culture today.

Although this dominant pattern may make it difficult for other stories to become popularized, there is a possibility to challenge this from within the tales themselves, by exploring how beauty is maintained or challenged in female relationships. In a 2003 study on the female beauty ideal in fairy tales, Lori Baker-Sperry and Liz Grauerholz found that the top three most reproduced Grimm fairy tales were “Cinderella,” “Snow White,” and “Brier Rose” (720). They measured reproduction of the tales from the Grimm’s seventh publication in 1857 up to 2000, in both book and film formats to determine which tales had been reproduced most often (715). The three tales they identify all touch on the female beauty ideal, but also feature an older, powerful woman who acts as the antagonist in the tale. These three tales all focus on a female conflict that centers in some way around beauty and competition. The popularity of these tales suggests that there is something about the way women and beauty are portrayed in the fairy tales that has come to be recognized as a staple of the genre. In order to challenge this traditional depiction of women and female relationships it is therefore necessary to first define the beauty ideal and the ways in which it has been reinforced and maintained as a necessary element of the fairy tale. This chapter will explore the dominant presence of the beauty ideal by addressing historical and typological reasons for its continued presence. I will then look at psychoanalytic scholarship, which has also played a dominant role in

maintaining the antagonistic female relationships of the genre by suggesting the stepmother and her destruction are natural and even necessary elements of the tales.

1.1 The Medieval Basis for the Dominant Presence of the Beauty Ideal for Women in Literary Fairy Tales

1.1.1 How the Written Tales Were Influenced by a Medieval Association between Beauty and Good Morality

In *The Ugly Woman: Transgressive Aesthetic Models in Italian Poetry from the Middle Ages to the Baroque* (2005), Patrizia Bettella argues that “today’s paradigms of female beauty include attributes such as youth, blond hair, delicate features, and well-proportioned bodies, all characteristics that were already glorified in medieval and Renaissance Italian literature” (3). Although Bettella is working with Italian poetry, the beauty paradigms and ideals that she identifies are just as present in fairy tales, not only in the case of the written tales of Giambattista Basile and the Grimm Brothers, but also in the 21st century fairy tale films. The fairy tale ideal of beauty and its association with good morality goes as far back as the Middle Ages:

as Umberto Eco shows in his *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, medieval aesthetics espoused the Christian ideal of ‘beauty of an upright soul in an upright body,’ thereby confirming the importance of the beautiful body as an expression of the good soul and of the ugly body as a marker of the evil soul. (Bettella 11)

The beauty ideal of the Middle Ages associates beauty morally with a good soul, and ugliness with vices and evil. Because of this, in literature and poetry “individuals who were considered sinful were perceived as physically repulsive. Hence old women, who were considered evil, were represented as ugly and disgusting” (Bettella 14-15). There was a decision to depict physically what a woman was believed to be internally, and this has transformed into a belief that what a woman looks like physically must be an outer

reflection of who she is morally. Nancy Canepa notes in “Ogres and Fools” that in some ways the feudal world of the fairy tale is similar to 17th century Naples, because “[t]he medieval historical referents of this sort of order [...] had been to some degree revived in the “refeudalized” kingdom of Naples” (224). Basile’s tales were intended as entertainment for the court, and the presence of a medieval beauty ideal that maintains physical appearance as an outward expression of inner morality can be seen in many of his tales. For instance, in “Le due pizzelle” (“The Two Little Pizzas”) there are two sisters who each have a daughter:

Marziella era così bella di faccia come di cuore; e, per contrario, il cuore e la faccia di Puccia formavano con unica regola faccia di canchero e cuore di pestilenza, e in ciò somigliava ai parenti, perché Troccola era un’arpa di dentro e di fuori.

Marziella was as beautiful of face as she was of heart; and, on the contrary, the heart and face of Puccia, following the same rule, were like the face of cancer and the heart of the plague, and in this she resembled her mother, because Troccola was a harpy on the inside and on the outside¹. (406-407)

The Grimm tales, although composed and collected in the 19th century, also maintain the association between beauty and good morality that dominates the Middle Ages. In *The Brothers Grimm and their Critics*, Christa Kamenetsky points out that “[d]uring the romantic movement, the critical reception of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* in Germany and abroad coincided with a new appreciation of nature, myths, and the medieval past” (181). In this way, even though written in the 19th century, there are characteristics of the medieval approach to beauty and morality that make their way into the genre. The Romantics “began to see a link between the language of medieval poetry and the traditional folk song,” which Kamenetsky argues the Grimms took “one step further by

¹ All quoted passages and citations of Basile’s tales in Italian are from Benedetto Croce’s Italian translation, *Il Pentamerone*; all English translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

searching for that naïve spirit also in the prose of traditional legends and folktales” (183). The use of a simplistic language that expresses clearly and succinctly the connection between appearance and morality in the Grimm tales shows the influence of the medieval conception of beauty combined with the Grimm’s own intention to create tales for a child audience with a didactic purpose. For example, “Mother Holle” tells the story of a widow with two daughters: “one of whom was pretty and industrious, whilst the other was ugly and idle” (133). Basile’s “Le due pizzelle” and the Grimm’s “Mother Holle,” both of which are versions of the “Mother Holle” tale type, refer to the medieval association between appearance and morality, transforming the medieval beauty ideal from a Christian ideology regarding appearance and moral standing into an element of the genre that has become prevalent and characteristic of the most well-known tales. The fairy tale takes this medieval ideal one step further by making it a hereditary rule: Marziella and Puccia mirror the appearance and temperament of their biological mothers, and the Grimm tale maintains this as well. This establishes a pattern in the genre regarding female appearance that is maintained based on heredity and social status.

The use of reward and punishment to exaggerate the women’s physical appearance creates a hyperbolic template of appearance that the fairy tale delights in. In “Le due pizzelle,” the different appearance between the two girls is emphasized when Marziella, for her kindness towards some fairies, is rewarded with the breath of roses and jasmines, hair that produces pearls and garnets, and feet that reveal lilies and violets wherever she steps (407). When Troccola sends her own daughter, Puccia, to get the same rewards, the selfish girl instead receives the gift of foaming at the mouth “come mula di medico” (“like a doctor’s mule”), lice, and a trailing of ferns and thistles

wherever she walks (408). Similar to the medieval mentality, Marziella's beauty is indicative of her kindness and good nature, whereas Puccia's ugliness is a representation of her selfishness and laziness. In this way the fairy tale takes that medieval association and transforms it into an element of the genre that rewards beauty with more beauty, while punishing ugliness by emphasizing the grotesque aspects of the female body. This pattern of reward and punishment is common in the fairy tale and the use of envy to instigate the moving of the plot establishes the physical comparison of women as a key plot element that becomes difficult to change because of how deep rooted it is in the genre.

1.1.2 The Historic Reality of Death in Childbirth and its Influence in Creating the Cruel, Envious Stepmother

Marina Warner and Maria Tatar have both pointed out that before medical intervention, high mortality rates in mothers meant that stepmothers were common (Williams 260). Warner argues in *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (1994) that the absence of a maternal mother in many tales could be an expression of the fact that "death in childbirth was the most common cause of female mortality, and surviving orphans would find themselves brought up by their mother's successor" (213). From this historical perspective, the prevalence of stepmothers in the fairy tale has to do, in part, with the fact that death in childbirth was a common occurrence. In addition to this, Warner notes,

when a second wife entered the house, she often found herself and her children in competition—often for scarce resources—with the surviving offspring of the earlier marriage, who may well have appeared to threaten her own children's place in their father's affection too. (213)

The stepmother's envy and cruelty is related to the reality of death in childbirth and the issues of inheritance when a stepmother and her children entered a new family. Because of this, "cruelty to her husband's biological children would be a way to ensure survival for her own biological children" (Williams 260). Therefore, cruelty exhibited by a stepmother towards her stepchildren potentially stemmed from a desire to ensure the well-being and survival of her own children. In the fairy tale world, however, this historically based worry transforms into an aesthetic obsession with possessing the beauty ideal, which becomes the source of power and success for women in the genre because it leads to a successful marriage.

1.1.3 How the Medieval Approach to Marriage and Beauty Establishes a Power Hierarchy for Women in Fairy Tales

Fairy tale society is patriarchal and feudal, and blood relations play a significant role in determining the social status and possibilities for both men and women. As already mentioned, heredity also determines appearance and therefore moral standing for women. Female relationships involving a (step) mother-daughter or (step) sister-sister are dominant in the genre and illustrate how strongly beauty and power are intertwined. Even though Basile and the Grimms did not write their tales in the Middle Ages, their fairy tales, and the fairy tale genre in general, seem to use a medieval model of society and hierarchy as the basis for the tales. This has helped to established beauty and also marriage as important factors in determining the success and wealth of women in the genre. Georges Duby describes marriage in the early Middle Ages in *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages* (1994), pointing out that the goal of parents and the senior members of the family involved

giving away their daughters and negotiating as best they could their daughters' reproductive potential and the advantages with which they were supposed to endow their offspring. It also meant helping a son to find a wife—to find her elsewhere, in another family, to bring her into his family, where she would cease to depend on her father, brothers and uncles, and would instead be subject to her husband. (7)

This medieval approach to marriage prioritizes a woman's reproductive potential and also establishes marriage as a social and financial contract. The fairy tale maintains this by making beauty the ultimate indicator of success, which becomes symbolic of a woman's health, youth, and by extension, her reproductive capability. Similar to the medieval desire to marry off daughters in a way that was advantageous to the social and political standing of the family, with marriage in fairy tales the most beautiful women are chosen to marry the wealthiest and most powerful men. Because beauty is the leading criteria in the choice of a wife, competition based on physical appearance becomes the primary source of conflict in female relationships.

1.1.4 How a Combination of the Medieval Beauty Ideal, Physical Reward and Punishment, and Marriage Enforce Violent Female Relationships in Versions of "Cinderella"

Lori Baker-Sperry and Liz Grauerholz in "The Pervasiveness and Persistence of the Feminine Beauty Ideal in Children's Fairy Tales" (2003) define the beauty ideal as a socially constructed notion that a woman's greatest asset is her physical appearance, and is therefore something that all women should strive to attain (711). They look at this in relation to cultural representations of gender in order to explore how "a normative feminine beauty ideal is maintained through cultural products such as fairy tales" (711). Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz point out that "of the tales in which danger or harm is associated with physical attractiveness (28 percent of all tales), 89 percent involve harm

to women. 40 percent of these acts of victimization are the direct result of the character's physical appearance" (719). Based on the Grimm tales that Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz look at, only a small sample of the tales involves an association between danger and physical appearance. However, of that small twenty-eight percent, their findings indicate that almost ninety percent of those tales involve harm to women.

Violence and morality often interact in fairy tales to illustrate a purpose or lesson the tale is attempting to reinforce, and this occurs most often in relation to a conflict based on the beauty ideal and the importance of marriage. In Basile's "La gatta cenerentola" ("The Cinderella Cat"), Zezolla, upset by the treatment of her stepmother, complains to her sewing teacher who then convinces the girl to kill her stepmother and insert her sewing teacher into her father's good graces as his next wife. No focus is placed on the little girl's willing murder of her first stepmother, and this establishes violence as a means of attaining a good marriage as the model for young Zezolla. The absence of a conflict based on the beauty ideal in this instance allows the stepmother to be successful, but the comparison between Zezolla and her stepsisters at the three feasts where she catches the attention of a king maintain the conflict based on possession of the beauty ideal that ensures Zezolla's ultimate success. The tale ends with Zezolla's marriage to the prince, and her disgruntled stepmother and stepsisters admitting, despite themselves, that "pazzo è chi contrasta con le stelle" ("he who opposes the stars is crazy"; 67). Basile acknowledges, in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek manner, the absurdity of trying to move outside of the delineated boundaries of the fairy tale social order. Instead of punishing the stepmother and stepsisters for their attempts to push themselves into the role of the successful protagonist, he acknowledges their efforts while also pointing out

the impossibility of transcending the strict aesthetic hierarchy of the genre. The Grimms, however, are much harsher in their treatment of Cinderella's stepsisters. The didactic aim of the tale results in more emphasis on the violent punishment of these stepsisters.

Although there is no murder of the first stepmother as there is in "La gatta cenerentola," upon discovering that the prince will marry the woman whose foot fits the golden slipper,

[t]he oldest took the shoe into a room to try it on, and her mother stood by her side. However, the shoe was too small for her, and she could not get her big toe into it. So her mother handed her a knife and said, "Cut your toe off. Once you become queen, you won't have to walk anymore."
(Grimm 83)

Violence here is turned into a spectacle as the girl follows her mother's orders, but is discovered when the prince sees blood leaking from her shoe (83). The extreme aesthetic ideal espoused in the tale leads to violence as a means of mutilating the body in order to fit the impossible ideal. Violence is also used to punish the stepsisters for attempting to change their bodies when, at Cinderella's wedding, two pigeons peck out their eyes (84). In this way the tale emphasizes the desirable behaviour of Cinderella by rewarding her with marriage at the same time that the sisters are punished not only for their perceived immoral behaviour but also because of their attempt to change their fate by physically changing their bodies. The way in which violence is depicted and dwelled on in these two tales also points to how a difference in the intended audience can diminish or reinforce the use of violence as a means of maintaining the association between physical appearance and morality. Basile's tale comments on the impossibility of changing social status, and by extension, physical appearance, without dwelling on violence, because his tale is intended as entertainment for an adult, court audience. The Grimms, intending to use the tale as a means of teaching children about desired social behaviours and customs, dwell on the spectacle of violence in order to reinforce the lesson of remaining in one's

social status. The use of violence in the Grimm tale also maintains the impossibility of a woman taking control of her body and its representation by punishing the attempts of the stepsisters to change their physical appearance.

1.1.5 The Lack of Correlation in Male Characters between Appearance, Violence and Morality

Stories featuring a male protagonist do not contain the strong association between appearance and morality, and the presence of violence is much more limited. Because of the medieval influence on the genre, when it comes to marriage men are valued not for their appearance and reproductive capabilities, but for their wealth. For example, in Basile's "Il ceppo d'oro" ("The Golden Stump") Parmetella agrees to marry a slave who promises to make her happy and offers her precious items and clothing. Later Parmetella realizes that he is a handsome prince who has been cursed to appear like a slave for seven years, but his appearance plays no significant role in her acceptance of his marriage proposal. However, the prince's mother, an ogress, has already planned a marriage for him. The handsome Tuoni-e-lampi ("Thunder and Lightning"), upon seeing his intended grotesque bride, is irritated by her mannerisms and appearance to such an extent that finally "con lampi di sdegno e tuoni di fatto, montatagli la mostarda al naso, mise mano a un coltello e scannò la sposa" ("with lightening contempt and thunderous acts, when the mustard reached his nostrils, he grabbed a knife and slit his wife's throat"; 497), taking Parmetella for his wife instead. Similar to Zezolla's murder of her first stepmother, violence is present in this tale in relation to the pursuit of an advantageous marriage, but without any moral implications or association between the acts of Thunder-and-Lightening and his handsome appearance. In Basile's "Peruonto," his mother thinks he is

“il più sciagurato perdigiorno, il più grande scioccone, il più solenne zoticone che la natura avesse prodotto” (“the most miserable idler, the biggest fool, and the most solemn lout that nature had ever produced”; 35), and his appearance is intensely grotesque. However, he is shown to be kind-hearted and loving to three boys who turn out to be the sons of a fairy, and is rewarded for his kindness with the gift of having all of his wishes granted. There is no emphasis on violence in association with Peruonto’s inner morality and outward appearance. His ability to procure a wife is also based not on his appearance but on the fact that since he is given the gift of having all of his wishes granted, this puts him in a position of power because he is able to generate wealth quite easily, which is why the king eventually accepts him as a son-in-law.

The Grimm tales focus even less attention on male appearances, but the correlation between a didactic purpose and the use of violence is still present. In “The Robber Bridegroom,” a father searches for a suitable husband for his daughter, and when he finds a man “who seemed to be very rich,” this is enough to convince the father that this man will be a good husband, so he promises his daughter to the man (141). For the young maiden, who “shudder[s] with dread” at the sight of her soon-to-be husband, her intuition proves correct when she discovers that he is actually a cannibal who plans to eat her once they are wed (143-144). The man’s appearance plays no role in the father’s decision that he is a suitable husband for his daughter since wealth is his major concern. However, the robber is punished at the end of the tale with death because of his cannibalistic actions.

For young women, beauty is almost always synonymous with the level of success and wealth they will have at the end of the tale, as well as an indication of their moral

standing. For men, appearance is a secondary asset, having nothing to do with morality and having no major impact on a man's success at the end of the tale. Although these differences are lightly commented on in Basile with regard to social status, the Grimm brothers maintain the didactic purpose of their tales through the use of violence for both male and female characters to reinforce the moral lessons they are portraying. This is problematic for female relationships in both versions of the tales because the use of marriage as the happy ending of tales involving female conflict establishes marriage as a symbol of power and success for female characters while reinforcing envy and competition over beauty as the factor that pushes the plot forward. This emphasis on physical appearance is not present in tales involving male conflict, allowing those conflicts to be resolved without the use of physical violence.

1.2 How the Archetype of the Mother and the Typology of a Tale Encourage Envy and Conflict Centered around the Beauty Ideal

Although many aspects of fairy tale society in general are based off of medieval characteristics, the fairy tale worlds of Basile and the Grimm brothers are a-historical in the sense that the organization of the society transcends the time period in which the actual tales were written down. Even when the tales are reproduced in different countries and time periods, the social structure and the moral and aesthetic values espoused in the tales remain relatively static. Historically there is some basis for the presence of envy between a stepmother and her stepchild regarding the dissipation of wealth in feudal society and the beauty ideal that stems from medieval beliefs about a person's outer appearance reflecting their inner morality. This partly explains why both envy and the beauty ideal have been reinforced more-so in the female characters in fairy tales, whereas

they are not depicted as largely significant for the male characters. In addition to looking at historical aspects of the fairy tale world, it will also be helpful to look at a-historical elements of the fairy tale, such as the archetype of the mother figure and the typology of the tales, to explore other ways in which the beauty ideal has been reinforced in the genre.

1.2.1 Exploring the Mother Archetype and its Influence on the Moral and Aesthetic Splitting of Female Characters into Two Extremes

Carl Jung argues in “Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious” that archetypes are found in the collective unconscious, the contents of which he calls primordial types, which are “universal images that have existed since the remotest times” (5). Jung suggests that myths and fairy tales are one of the more well-known expressions of archetypes, and archetypal and psychoanalytic criticism of fairy tales have been a common approach to studying fairy tales in the past. Marie Louise-von Franz, a scholar who uses a Jungian approach to study fairy tales, argues in *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales* (1996) that fairy tales “represent the archetypes in their simplest, barest, and most concise form. In this pure form, the archetypal images afford us the best clues to the understanding of the processes going on in the collective psyche,” and as such “they mirror the basic patterns of the psyche more clearly” (1). The goal with this type of analysis is to uncover the desires of the unconscious through the exploration and identification of these archetypes, and by doing so, be able to come to a better understanding of the self. Jung’s theory of archetypes presents a way of approaching and understanding the common dichotomy between mother and stepmother in fairy tales, by pointing out a set of characteristics in the mother archetype that he argues is a universal

image that has been present in the human unconscious mind since the beginning of time. This provides a different method for understanding and explaining the continuous portrayal of the stepmother as evil that can account for its presence in tales from different time periods and cultures because of its universal element. The role of beauty is not explored in Jung's mother archetype, but through a combination of the positive and negative traits attributed to the mother and the medieval mentality associated with morality and physical appearance, it will be possible to approach an understanding of beauty and female relationships in fairy tales from a different perspective.

Jung's description of the mother archetype begins with the maternal mother or grandmother, and moves outward to the stepmother, mother-in law, and then "any woman with whom a relationship exists" (81). He identifies two sets of qualities that can be associated with the mother archetype. On the one side is the good mother who represents "maternal solitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason" (82). This set of qualities in fairy tales usually applies to the biological mother, or a helpful older woman represented by a witch, a fairy, or a symbolic representation of a dead mother (81). On the other side, the mother archetype "may connote anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate" (82). Although Jung makes no mention of physical appearance, the world of the fairy tale equates beauty with goodness and ugliness with negative qualities. What therefore happens in fairy tale depictions of the mother archetype is the two types of mother, representing maternal sympathy and wisdom on the one hand, and anything hidden, secretive, poisonous and terrifying on the other hand, are split into two different

women, the biological mother and the stepmother. To further emphasize the opposing traits of these two ‘types’ of women, a physical difference is used to delineate the good mother, as a beautiful woman, from the bad mother, who is ugly. For instance, in Basile’s “Le due pizzelle,” Puccia is described by her resemblance to her parents, and particularly her mother, who “era un’arpia di dentro e di fuori” (“was a harpy on the inside and on the outside”; 407). Similarly, in the Grimm’s “The Juniper Tree,” the little boy’s biological mother is described as “beautiful and pious” (158). The association between a woman’s physical appearance and her inner personality are closely linked in the fairy tale, and the presence of the mother archetype in various tales often serves to strengthen the connection between beauty and goodness and ugliness and negative traits. This association is not made as often with male characters, but is in keeping as well with the medieval mentality regarding beauty and goodness. Even without the presence of a division based on appearance, this universal archetype still splits women morally into two different depictions, rather than one complex image, and the maintenance of that splitting reinforces negative female relationships and impossible ideals of beauty rather than working to challenge that ideal.

1.2.2 How Envy and Violence Based on the “Snow White” Typology Reinforce Beauty as the Source of Power and Center of Conflict in Female Relationships

In addition to looking at the role of the mother archetype in helping to maintain a binary depiction of women in the tales, the typology of the tale itself may also influence the relationship dynamics between women and the continued presence of the beauty ideal as a source of conflict. In *The Types of the Folk-Tale: A Classification and Bibliography* by Antti Aarne, translated and expanded by Stith Thompson (1961), the plot of tale type

709, “Snow White” is identified through two main plot elements: “the wicked stepmother seeks to kill the maiden. At the dwarfs’ (robbers’) house, where the prince finds the maiden and marries her” (245), that involve violence between female characters and resolves the conflict at the end through marriage. There are five sections to this tale as described in the Aarne-Thompson classification, in which (i) “Snow White has skin like snow and lips like blood,” and the stepmother’s mirror tells her that Snow White is more beautiful than she; (ii) the stepmother orders for Snow White to be killed but the hunter saves her; (iii) the stepmother attempts to kill Snow White herself through means of a poisoned comb, laces, and the poisoned apple; (iv) the dwarfs are able to save Snow White from the first two attempts but not the third, and place her in a glass coffin; and (v) in which a prince revives Snow White, and the stepmother is forced to dance on red hot iron shoes to her death (245). The typology of this tale begins with Snow White possessing the beauty ideal, and her stepmother immediately acknowledging indirectly through the voice of the mirror, the threat that Snow White’s beauty poses to the queen. The stepmother’s demands to have Snow White killed emphasize the threatening aspect of the beauty ideal while also reinforcing the association between beauty and power for female characters. The tale ends with the maintenance of the patriarchal ideal, through the resolution of the tension between the stepmother and Snow White at the hands of the prince, who awakens the sleeping princess after which the two of them punish the queen for her jealous actions. The typology of this tale is characterized by the stepmother’s desire to kill Snow White, and Snow White’s eventual marriage to the prince. Two issues need to be addressed to look at how conflict is maintained and developed between Snow

White and her stepmother: what is the source of the queen's envy, and how is the beauty ideal enforced to maintain an antagonistic relationship between the two women?

In Basile's "La schiavotta" ("The Little Slave Girl") an earlier version of the tale, the unborn Lisa is cursed by a fairy who, racing to place a charm on the unborn baby, instead trips and twists her foot. In her anger at falling, the fairy blames the child, and she curses Lisa to die when she is seven (208). Upon her death, Lisa's mother encloses her in seven crystal caskets, locking her away and asking her brother to always guard the last room of the house in which her dead daughter lies (209). Lisa's uncle marries, and his wife is curious as to what is kept in that locked room. When he leaves on a hunting trip she takes a peek inside and finds the sleeping Lisa, who has continued to grow despite the fairy's curse. In this version of the tale, the stepmother figure, represented by Lisa's aunt, is jealous of Lisa's beauty, but her envy is explicitly linked to the belief that this beautiful girl will take her husband's attention away from her. The source of conflict therefore centers on the issue of marriage, which produces the antagonistic female relationship in this version of the tale. Upon seeing Lisa, the wife is immediately jealous of her beauty, and pulls the girl out of the coffin, which wakes Lisa from the curse (209). After waking, "e tutta fiele come schiava, rabbiosa come cagna che ha partorito, velenosa come serpe, le tagliò subito i capelli, le aggiustò una bastonatura coi fiocchi, le mise un vestito stracciato, e ogni giorno le scaricava bernoccoli alla testa" ("as full of gall as a slave, as rabid as a bitch that has just given birth, and as venomous as a snake, she immediately cut Lisa's hair, fixed her up a strong beating, dressed her in rags, and every day unloaded lumps on her head"; 210). The significance of this violence lies in the nature of the aunt's envy. Because it is Lisa's beauty and by extension, her position as wife, that the

aunt feels threatened by, her violence against the young girl is meant not only to punish her, but to distort and destroy Lisa's beauty, thus removing any sense of a threat and reinforcing the aunt's position as the most beautiful woman in the house. Although she encompasses the negative attributes of Jung's mother archetype, this tale type requires the presence of an antagonistic stepmother because it is her envy that pushes the tale into motion, and also what moves it towards its eventual resolution. This tale type links envy specifically with the beauty ideal, and the envy exhibits itself in this tale through the aunt's assumption that her husband is or has the potential to be unfaithful to her, because of the presence of another beautiful woman. The use of envy as an element of the tale type itself shows that the presence of the beauty ideal and envy towards it can function in a purely formalistic sense as the means of establishing a conflict to push the plot forward.

In the Grimm version of the tale, "Snow White," the reason for the queen's envy over Snow White's beauty is not explicitly stated, and initially seems to stem from a sense of vanity in the queen: "mirror, mirror, on the wall, who in this realm is the fairest of all?" (181). The immediate correlation between the beauty of this queen and the pride she derives from that beauty are presented as negative: she is described as "beautiful but proud and haughty, and she could not tolerate anyone else who might rival her beauty" (181). This establishes a problematic association between the desire for beauty as a negative trait in women. In this version of the tale, the queen herself possesses the beauty ideal, and her constant search for reassurance from her magic mirror reinforces the notion that she maintains her beauty as a means of maintaining her power. As such, the only threat to her power is through another woman more beautiful than herself, which is what

happens as Snow White grows older, until finally the mirror states that Snow White has surpassed the queen in beauty (181):

[t]he queen shuddered and became yellow and green with envy. From that hour on, her hate for the girl was so great that her heart throbbed and turned in her breast each time she saw Snow White. Like weeds, the envy and arrogance grew so dense in her heart that she no longer had any peace, day or night. (182)

Instead of distorting the beautiful girl's appearance through physical abuse as the aunt does in "La schiavotta," the queen's methods of attempting to kill Snow White are more subtle. Disguising herself as an old peddler, the queen presents Snow White with a set of stay laces and catches the young girl's attention with "a lace woven from silk of many different colours" (184). Unable to resist the pretty lace, Snow White lets the queen into the cottage, who then laces her dress so tightly that Snow White "lost her breath and fell down as if dead" (184). When this first attempt fails to kill Snow White, the queen returns again, this time with a poisoned comb that "pleased the girl so much that she let herself be carried away" and when the queen places the beautiful comb in Snow White's hair, she falls down again as if dead (185). There is a shift from Basile to Grimm, from an overt, violent protest of the girl's beauty and what it signifies, to a subtle display of the queen's power in her ability to entice Snow White not only with beautiful objects, but with objects that are meant to enhance Snow White's appearance. This shows how the desire for beauty is morally categorized in different ways, largely based on a woman's age. Snow White is only temporarily punished for her desire for pretty objects, but the queen is punished permanently with death for her desire to maintain her beauty.

Following the typology, the queen succeeds in her third attempt as Snow White ingests a symbolic representation of the queen's envy through the poisoned apple. The apple "on the outside [...] looked beautiful—white with red cheeks. Anyone who saw it

would be enticed, but whoever took a bite was bound to die” (186). The nature of this apple represents the dual nature of the jealous queen, who continuously presents herself to Snow White as a poor and kindly beggar woman, but whose intentions are malicious. Upon Snow White’s refusal to take the apple, the queen cuts it in two, giving Snow White the red half, as the queen eats the white, at which point “Snow White was eager to eat the beautiful apple, and when she saw the peasant woman eating her half, she could no longer resist, stretched out her hand, and took the poisoned half” (186). The significance of the red and white colouring of the apple, similar to the physical appearance of the female characters, has moral implications. In *Grimm Language: Grammar, Gender and Genuineness in the Fairy Tales* (2010), Orrin W. Robinson analyzes the language used in the Grimm tales and points out that “when good *schön* girls are associated with a color, it is white” (112). Robinson argues that use of the colour *weiß* “is totally consistent with the implications of goodness and purity” (112). In “Snow White,” the stepmother consumes the white half of the apple, which by its very colour indicates its purity and lack of poison. This literal and symbolic consumption of a representation of goodness and purity by the representation of evil in the tale has no ill effects on the stepmother. Snow White, whose name alone is an expression of her purity, on the other hand, is poisoned by the *rot* side of the apple. Robinson argues that, contrary to the symbolism of the colours white and black in fairy tales, the colour red can be somewhat ambivalent in its meaning. He does, however, point out that “good unsexed girls are very much on the *weiß* side of things, but sexed girls, whether good or not, are more on the *rot* side” (123). Robinson equates the difference between white and red as a representation of the innocence, or lack of innocence, of a female character, and as such,

that difference can perhaps also be considered one of maturity, or age. This points to an attempt by the Grimm brothers to encourage beauty in young women, but to punish it heavily in older women who seek to maintain a youthful appearance.

A tale with a similar typology to the “Snow White” tale, but with a male protagonist, is the Grimm’s “The Juniper Tree.” This tale begins very similarly to “Snow White,” with a beautiful wife and her rich husband wishing for a child. Cutting her finger as she peels an apple, the wife wishes for a child “as red as blood and as white as snow,” and nine months later is gifted with a baby boy who fits the description (158-159). This follows the “Snow White” typology, however after the mother dies and the husband remarries, the stepmother is not concerned with her stepson’s appearance—her only worry is that he will inherit his father’s wealth, rather than her own daughter. Envy is still present, but with a stepmother-son relationship the source of that envy is described as one of inheritance, not physical beauty. The typology changes when appearance and a male character are associated and the result is a focus on inheritance rather than beauty or marriage. Violence is still present in the tale, as the stepmother decapitates the little boy and feeds him to his father, but the woman’s own daughter shows compassion and sadness for her stepbrother, crying over his bones and then burying them under a juniper tree (160). In this way it becomes clear that while step-sister relationships are constantly challenged, this step-sister and brother relationship contains compassion and love. The stepmother’s envy over her son’s inheritance manifests itself differently because it is aimed towards a male character, and the value placed on the beauty ideal is completely absent from the tale.

1.3 How the Perceived Audience of the Tales and Psychoanalytic Scholarship Have Legitimized the Use of Violence and Punishment of Female Envy over Beauty

1.3.1 How Psychoanalytic Scholarship Explains the Moral Splitting of the Mother/Stepmother and the Presence of Envy in Female Relationships

Beauty as a source of conflict in female relationships has a basis in the medieval elements of the tales, the reality of death in childbirth, and the archetypal and typological elements that make up the tales. Psychoanalytic scholarship has also played a role in maintaining and legitimizing the presence of antagonistic female relationships in the genre. In *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1975), Bruno Bettelheim explains the splitting of the good and bad mother into two figures as the attempts of a child to reconcile his or her loving mother, with the cruel one who disciplines the child, because of the difficulty of accepting that these two women are actually the same person (68). According to Bettelheim this occurs not only with the mother, but also within the child him or herself: “when he experiences the emotional need to do so, the child not only splits a parent into two figures, but he may also split himself into two people who, he wishes to believe, have nothing in common with each other” (69). Instead of looking at the history or typology of the tales, Bettelheim’s psychoanalytic approach explains the common splitting of the mother into two opposing women, as a method of dealing with the confusing variations in a mother’s temperament for young children. Psychoanalytic approaches are often used to address specifically gendered issues in the tales, and they rely largely on Freud’s theory of oedipal conflict in children, especially, in the case of fairy tales, as it relates to the female characters. For

instance, in his interpretation of the Grimm's "Snow White," Bettelheim argues that "the story deals essentially with the oedipal conflicts between mother and daughter" (202).

Bettelheim proposes the following theory in regards to the queen's jealousy over the young Snow White:

[t]he queen's consulting the mirror about her worth—i.e., beauty—repeats the ancient theme of Narcissus, who loved only himself, so much that he became swallowed up by his self-love. It is the narcissistic parent who feels most threatened by his child's growing up, because that means the parent must be aging. (202-203)

According to this interpretation, the queen's envy stems not only from her jealousy over Snow White's beauty, but also because of her anxiety over the fact that she herself is aging. However, this anxiety over aging as Bettelheim presents it takes on a negative connotation when referred to in the context of Narcissus, because it identifies the desire for beauty as vanity and therefore a negative trait in women. If the queen associates her worth with her beauty, then it is inevitable that as she ages her diminishing beauty will be equated with her diminishing sense of worth as well as power. This in turn will be further highlighted by the growth and development of her daughter, provoking feelings not only of envy, but of anxiety as well. This explanation is problematic for the women of the tales, because that worry over the loss of beauty is not an expression of vanity; it is a legitimate worry over an aging or ugly woman's lack or loss of her primary source of power in fairy tale society.

1.3.2 The Danger with Focusing on a Psychoanalytic Approach to Women and Female Relationships through the Lens of the Child Reader

Marina Warner problematizes Bettelheim's approach to understanding the issue of motherhood in *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (1994), arguing that

[t]he bad mother has become an inevitable, even required ingredient in fantasy, and hatred of her a legitimate, applauded stratagem of psychic survival. Bettelheim's theory has contributed to the continuing absence of good mothers from fairy tales in all kinds of media, and to a dangerous degree which itself mirrors current prejudices and reinforces them. His argument, and its tremendous diffusion and wide-spread acceptance, have effaced from memory the historical reasons for woman's cruelty within the home and have made such behaviour seem natural, even intrinsic to the mother-child relationship. It has even helped to ratify the expectation of strife as healthy and the resulting hatred as therapeutic. (212-213)

Warner argues that the justification of hatred and cruelty to a stepmother as a healthy expression of a child's anger and frustration towards their biological mother is a dangerous position to take because of its acceptance and acknowledgement that such behaviour is both healthy and therapeutic. For example, the three versions of Snow White that I have looked at all employ violent means of punishment to the stepmother which are presented as justified based on the stepmother's transgressions. However, they fail to acknowledge how the administration of these methods, including forcing the queen to dance in red hot iron slippers at Snow White's wedding in the Grimm version, are in many ways reminiscent of the cruelty of the stepmother to begin with.

In Christy Williams' analysis of Warner's argument, she points out the problematic nature of reinforcing these negative female stereotypes, and goes so far as to suggest that, "had Bettelheim's theory not been so popular, perhaps the wicked stepmother would not be embraced as *the* fairy-tale villain" (260). Approaching the

stepmother as a required element of the fairy tale, in addition to the acceptance of hatred towards her as a legitimate means for coping with psychological distrust and anger towards her, enforces the divide between these two types of women, propagating the notion that “good” women should inhabit all of the features of the “good” mother, without any of the negative emotions and behaviours of her evil counterpart. A psychoanalytic reading of the contrast between these two types of women is harmful to understandings of a child’s relationship to his or her mother, and also reinforces the notion that an evil stepmother is necessary and vital to these tales. This is problematic because it maintains the elements of female rivalry and jealousy, but does not acknowledge historical and typological factors that also play a role in choosing to depict the stepmother as the villain. As such, what is partly due to historical issues involving death in childbirth, the maintenance of the medieval mentality regarding beauty and marriage, and the typological nature of specific tales that involve female rivalry, is reduced to a child’s unconscious desire to separate their mother into two different women. This transforms the mother’s violent demise at the end of the tale into a celebrated occasion that legitimizes female rivalry through the assertion that these stepmothers deserve their punishments.

1.3.3 Shifting the Focus by Looking at the Problematic Idealization of the Mother

Leyla Navaro, exploring the roots of envy and competition amongst women through a psychological and sociological approach in *Envy, Competition and Gender: Theory, Clinical Applications and Group Work* (2007), argues the following:

[a] tacit, gender-bound contract inhibits most women from competing openly among themselves, leading female competition into stifled,

indirect, camouflaged manipulations. The dynamic of this drama lies within the deeply rooted mother-daughter interaction. For centuries, the idealization of motherhood led to the attribution of envy, jealousy, and competition to “stepmothers” and “stepsisters” (Snow White, Cinderella), forbidding those normal emotions between women. (79)

Navaro points out not only the nature of female competition as indirect and manipulative, but she argues that this competition stems from an idealization of motherhood that has led to a splitting of the mother’s characteristics into two people: the good biological mother, and the bad step-mother, who exhibits all of the perceived negative emotions such as envy and competition. This is in keeping with Jung’s mother archetype and is also similar to Bettelheim’s suggestions that the child splits their mother into two mothers to cope with her negative treatment of the child. However, Navaro’s argument is different in the sense that this splitting has everything to do with an idealization of the mother, and nothing to do with a child’s attempts to reconcile his or her issues with their biological mother. This idealization points to how prevalent a splitting of women into positive and negative traits is, which is depicted physically through the presence or absence of beauty in the fairy tale.

Maria Tatar, in *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales* (2003), points out that “Wilhelm Grimm’s habit of intensifying maternal malice ultimately led him to make at least one significant substantive change in a number of tales” (36), and she also mentions that “the Grimms’ seized nearly every available opportunity to emphasize the virtue of hard work and made a point of correlating diligence with beauty and desirability wherever possible” (30). One of the aims of the Grimm brothers in the editing of their tales was to make the tales “both culturally symptomatic and culturally normative, reflecting German national identity and modeling it for the next generation” (Tatar xx). Jack Zipes, in *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World*

(2002) points out that the Grimms “emphasized specific role models for male and female protagonists according to the dominant patriarchal code of the time” (46). The aesthetic and moral splitting of women therefore contains within it many elements involving history, archetypes and the Grimm’s own purpose in writing the tales. However, even in Basile’s tales that physical splitting is still present, without any of the attempts at a didactic purpose.

1.3.4 How Versions of “Sleeping Beauty” Maintain Female Rivalry and Diminish the Importance of Female Relationships

Although not all tales dealing with female rivalry are based on appearances, the ways in which female envy is expressed in the tales tend toward violent extremes in which the mother’s envy of her rival also becomes a desire to physically consume the source of her envy. Basile’s “Sole, luna e Talia” (“Sun, Moon and Talia”), an early version of the “Sleeping Beauty” tale type, begins with the birth of a princess and the revelation from a group of wise men and fortune-tellers that the princess will one day be in grave danger because of a piece of flax (499). Unlike the tale’s typology, this version does not include the curse of a fairy, removing that element of female conflict from the tale. The princess falls unconscious due to a piece of flax, after which her father places her inside the palace and leaves. Years later a king passes by and finds her. After many attempts to wake her up, and “essendosi egli acceso di quelle bellezze, la portò di peso sopra un letto ne colse i frutti d’amori” (“having been enflamed by her beauty, he carried her onto a bed and plucked the fruits of love”; 499). Nine months later the sleeping Talia gives birth to twin boys who finally awaken her, and when the king comes back and discovers her awake with their two children, he returns to his kingdom and cannot stop

boasting about her beauty, which incites the rage and envy of his wife. This also is not included in the tale type, but it creates a stronger sense of rivalry between the female characters than is present in the typology of the tale itself. The queen's envy is fueled by the king's boasts of Talia's beauty and the beauty of their two sons, which threatens the queen's marriage and the inheritance of her own son. In an attempt to assuage this envy, the queen plots for the death of the two little boys, ordering her cook to "scannarli e farne diversi manicaretti e salse per darli a mangiare al misero padre" ("slit their throats and make various little delicacies and sauces out of them, to feed to their poor father"; 501). These two little boys pose a threat to the queen's inheritance for her own biological son, and she chooses a quick and brutal method to get rid of them. Violence functions here to ensure the inheritance of her own son, by destroying the obstacle to that inheritance. This is not enough for the jealous queen however, who then summons Talia and greets her in the following way:

Sii la benvenuta, madama Troccola! Tu sei quella fine stoffa, quella buon'erba che ti godi mio marito? Tu sei quella cagna malvagia, che me fa stare con tante giravolte di capo? Va', che sei giunta al purgatorio, dove ti farò scontare il danno che mi hai fatto!

Welcome, madam Troccola! So you are that exquisite material, that nice weed that is being enjoyed by my husband? So you are that wicked bitch, who makes my head spin with twists and turns? Go on, you've joined purgatory, where you will atone for the damage you have caused me!
(501)

Upon hearing these accusations, Talia attempts to defend herself by pointing out that she was asleep when the king took advantage of her, "ma la regina non volle intendere scuse, e, fatto accendere in mezzo allo stesso cortile del palazzo un gran fuoco, comandò che ve la gettassero dentro" ("but the queen did not want to hear excuses, and she had a large fire lit in the middle of the courtyard, ordering that Talia be thrown in"; 502). Although it

is the king's actions that have put both women in this predicament, the queen takes her anger out not on the king, but on Talia and her children. This version of the tale creates a problematic dynamic between the two women, making a villain out of the cuckolded queen rather than punishing her unfaithful husband, and ends with the queen being tossed into the fire she was preparing for Talia. This maintains a cycle of violence and envy between women, without accounting for other factors that have led to their troubled relationship, even within the plot itself. The focus on appearances and the queen's envy regarding physical beauty exhibits itself more strongly in the female characters, because of the genre's dominant focus on appearance for women. The misplaced aggression therefore stems from the misplaced source of envy as appearance rather than as inheritance or wealth.

In the Grimm's "Brier Rose," the curse placed on the princess has nothing to do with female rivalry and instead is produced because since the king and queen have only twelve golden plates and there are thirteen wise women, they can only invite twelve of them. This follows the typology, and there is no punishment to the wise woman who curses the princess, or to the old woman carrying the spindle that puts the princess into her hundred year sleep. The Grimm brothers end their version of the tale with the waking up of the princess and a marriage between her and her rescuer, removing the female conflict present in Basile's version and ending the tale on a happy patriarchal note. Although the Grimms maintain the typology and there is no female conflict, Basile diverts from the typology of the same tale and is easily able to make female envy and conflict the motivation for the plot development, showing that even with an eye to

audience and typology the beauty ideal easily inserts itself when female conflict becomes the main focus of the tale.

1.3.5 Are the Same Patterns of Envy, Conflict and Punishment in Female Relationships Also Present in Male Relationships?

Male conflict often centers on the pursuit of wealth, and because of this, the same patterns of envy, conflict, and physical punishment that are characteristic of female relationships in fairy tales are not as present in male relationships. Basile's "I mesi" ("The Months") follows two brothers, one rich and one poor. The poor brother, Lise, is rewarded for speaking well of the month March. However, when his wealthy brother Cianne attempts to get the same rewards he is punished with one hundred flails every time he makes a wish because he speaks horribly of the month. If Cianne's desire to gain the wealth and good fortune of his brother can be equated with a stepmother's desire to gain a good marriage for her daughter, or a wealthy inheritance for her son, the punishment is much milder in the male conflict than it is in the female conflict. Physical punishment is involved, but after Lise tells his brother he only got what he deserved, he then shows forgiveness, pardoning his brother and sharing his wealth between the two of them (479). Basile's "I due fratelli" ("The Two Brothers") tells a similar tale, with a rich, cruel brother and a poor virtuous one who comes into a fortune while his rich brother becomes penniless because of his gambling, and ends up on the gallows for a theft he has not committed. As he is about to be hanged, his innocence is revealed, and Marcuccio, realizing his brother's reputation has not been harmed, stands up for him and forgives him for his earlier cruelties, saying, "io, dimentico dei dispregi che mi usasti, ti terrò in queste pupille" ("I have forgotten the contempt that you showed me, and I will keep you

in my eyes”; 368). In both of these tales, the brothers ultimately reconcile their differences and although the envious brother is punished, he recognizes the error of his ways and the two restore their relationship at the end of the tale. This is very different from the tales of female conflict, in which the women who exhibit envy are punished permanently with physical mutilation or death, and there is no reconciliation between the two women at the end of the tale.

The Grimm’s “The Singing Bone” also tells the story of two brothers, but unlike the Basile tales, this one does not end in a happy reconciliation between the two, which perhaps is a result of the conflict regarding marriage rather than wealth. A king offers the hand of his only daughter to the man who manages to kill a wild boar that has been ravaging the land, and two brothers both take up the cause, one out of pride, and one out of the “goodness of his heart” (99). The good brother is gifted with a spear that will help him attack the boar, and he successfully kills it and heads back to present it to the king. His prideful brother, however, realizes the success of his younger brother, and kills him before burying him under a bridge, and presenting the boar to the king (99-100). However, the bones of the younger brother are discovered, which sing of his death, upon which the king finds out the truth and the older brother is “sewn up in a sack and drowned” (100). Envy and pride which are linked to the pursuit of marriage in this tale result in a more violent end to the brothers, contrary to Basile’s tales involving a conflict over wealth. In the Grimm’s “The Three Brothers,” three brothers each learn a trade, attempting to prove to their father which of them should inherit the house once he dies. Astonished by his youngest son’s ability to prevent a single drop of rain from falling on him because of his superb fencing skills, the father decides that the house will go to the

youngest (407-408). Instead of inciting envy and anger in the two older brothers, they accept the decision, “and since they cared for each other so much, all three of them stayed in the house together” (408). The complete absence of envy in this tale leads to the success of all three brothers, who because of their love for each other continue to live happily together in the house even after their father’s death. The message is clear: envy is destructive, and its complete absence is necessary for siblings to coexist peacefully. However, in Basile the message is slightly different. Both of the Basile tales involve envy regarding the success of one brother over the other, but instead of resulting in violence, after a period of time in which the brothers fight and do not get along, they eventually reconcile their issues.

In the male relationships from Basile to Grimm, Basile puts envy and the possibility of reconciliation in a single tale, and the Grimm version separates the two, making it seem as though with the presence of envy, there is no possibility of reconciliation between the brothers, indicated by the murder of the younger brother in “The Singing Bone,” and the complete lack of envy in “The Three Brothers.” The difference in the source of conflict between the tales shows that even in tales regarding male conflict, if the center of that conflict involves the pursuit of a suitable marriage partner, that envy is punished more violently than envy directed towards the attainment of more wealth. However, even in “The Singing Bone” where the conflict involves marriage, no focus is placed on the physical appearance of the two brothers competing to win the hand of the princess. This suggests that physical appearance as a means of attaining success and wealth is a strictly female issue in the genre, whereas for male characters the importance is instead placed on their actions. Basile presents a more fluid

representation of female conflict, whereas the Grimm versions are often more strict in their delineation of 'good' and 'bad' into two separate women. However, both Basile and the Grimms end the tales of female conflict with the violent punishment of the woman representing the evil character, whether she is completely evil, or only partially so, offering none of the reconciliation present in tales involving conflict between male characters.

1.4 How Historical, Archetypal and Typological Reasons for the Beauty Ideal in Fairy Tales Morphs into Anxiety and Spectacle of the Female Body

Max Lüthi in *The Fairy Tale as Art Form and Portrait of Man* (1984) argues that in the fairy tale genre, ugliness is "first and foremost the foil of the beautiful" (28), and as such, the ugly characters become the complete opposite of everything their beautiful relations stand for. Although not all ugly women are evil in the tales, they are always presented as lacking in some way, and for this reason they envy the beautiful characters. From this envy, conflict arises that usually pushes the plot into motion in such a way that the reader is encouraged to empathize with the beautiful woman, and scorn and hate the ugly woman. The problem with this aesthetic and moral splitting of traits into two different women is that it creates a scenario in which envy and competition are inevitable. Because the beautiful woman will always end up being successful in the fairy tale, the moral splitting of traits into two women creates what Christy Williams argues has become a natural and acceptable competition between women that has come to be understood as a standard trait of the fairy tale. The insertion of cruelty and hatred between these characters has moved away from the historical desire of stepmothers to secure resources for their children, to a specifically female problem that has less and less

to do with maintaining wealth in a feudal society, and more to do with the maintenance of appearances. In the eclogue of the first day of Basile's collection of tales, Iacovuccio describes an item called the crucible, which has the power to strip away any illusions, including those of a woman who uses cosmetics and clothing to disguise her 'true' appearance: "oh sciocco, oh babbione, presto, mettila presto alla coppella! Ché quella che ti pare beltà meravigliosa, scoprirai che l'è un destro inverniciato, un muro intonacato, maschera ferrarere" ("Fool, idiot, put her immediately in the crucible! Because she who appears to be a marvelous beauty, you will discover is a filthy toilet, a plastered wall, a mask from Ferrara"; 133). The distrust here regarding appearances and illusion is one that is echoed not just in the patriarchal, male voice of Iacovuccio, but is exhibited in the women he is describing through a sense of anxiety and unease that unfolds as many of the tales focusing on female appearance are told. The historic worry over the resources for a stepmother's child when she remarries has slowly transformed as the focus is placed more and more on the differences in appearance between two women, rather than emphasizing the underlying anxiety over the worry for inheritance. The conflict is increasingly described as a conflict of physical appearances, which has changed the nature of the rivalry between women in the tales.

The splitting of the mother into two figures has not only created a primary villain in tale types including "Cinderella," "Snow White," and "Brier Rose," but it also enforces feelings of envy as the driving force behind the tales. Although envy is present in tales with both men and women, in tales involving women the motivation behind this envy seems to have slowly transformed from a historical worry for the resources and well-being of one's children, to an unease with the artificial maintenance of beauty. The

inability to achieve the beauty ideal for ugly and aging women leads not only to envy of women who possess that beauty ideal, but also leads to an anxiety over the inaccessibility of the beauty ideal and a creation of the spectacle of the female body, both of which will be explored further in Chapter Two.

Chapter 2

2 The Potential of the Fairy Tale Genre to Challenge the Beauty Ideal through Anxiety over Appearances and the Spectacle of Violence in Female Relationships

When she was finally caught, they heated a pair of iron slippers over red hot coals, and made her dance at Snow White's wedding. She crawled out into the snow, dragging her raw, blistered, useless feet into a swamp nearby. This broken woman was once the fairest of them all. ("A Successor")

Historical reasons for the dominance of the beauty ideal in fairy tales go back primarily to a medieval influence on the association between morality and physical appearance. The historic reality of death in childbirth and a medieval approach to marriage create a power hierarchy for women that depends on beauty to ensure a successful marriage and therefore a good life, and this creates envious and antagonistic relationships between women. The universal mother archetype has helped maintain a strict moral splitting of women into good and bad, and the typology of certain tales makes use of this to establish conflict and push the plot forward. In Bruno Bettelheim's psychoanalytic approach to the tales, he suggests that a moral splitting of characters allows the child reader to reconcile his or her own problems through a legitimate hatred of the 'evil' women. Beauty and ugliness, the good and bad woman, are split into two different people in this genre, and scholarship works to understand why and how that splitting occurs. However, by exploring how anxiety and spectacle draw attention to the transgressions of the female body against the beauty ideal through an aesthetic approach to the tales, it is possible to identify how women within this genre work to challenge the strict physical and moral boundaries that are imposed on them.

2.1 Approaching Anxiety through an Aesthetic Lens

Anxiety in the fairy tale is usually depicted in very subtle ways, if it is expressed at all. Because the genre generally features shorter stories, there is rarely room to discuss in length a character's inner thoughts and worries. However, because of the fairy tale's focus on appearances, instances of anxiety can be found in physical expressions. By focusing on descriptions of women's bodies it becomes evident that anxiety holds a significant position in this genre. It is often expressed through physical agitation and discomfort, and exploring the roots of this anxiety in female relationships will reveal whether there is awareness in the characters of the beauty ideal and its rewards, and perhaps also a discontent with that ideal. The physical expressions of anxiety can potentially establish a space within the genre to draw attention to the problematic dominance of the female beauty ideal.

2.1.1 The Artificial Nature of the Fairy Tale and the Importance of an Aesthetic Approach to Women and Violence

In *The Fairy Tale as Art Form and Portrait of Man* (1984), Max Lüthi suggests that “the *ugly* is first and foremost the foil of the beautiful” (28). Lüthi's aesthetic approach to fairy tales identifies beauty and ugliness as not only opposites, but also enemies that cannot coexist in the same space without coming into conflict. However, Lüthi points out a constant movement between beauty and ugliness, arguing that “in contrast to this absolute, this superlative beauty, there is something ugly, a distorted form which at times pushes the beautiful aside and takes its place” (11). Lüthi prioritizes the artificial nature of the fairy tale and suggests that beauty itself “can also be used as a carrier of the theme of appearance versus reality” (38). He also notes that “even as

appearance it has radiance and exercises power” (38). There is something about the nature of the fairy tale genre itself in this aesthetic approach, that lends it a kind of movement and power that is not always possible in psychoanalytic scholarship. Using an aesthetic approach to the body as an ideal of beauty in combination with a grotesque transgression of that ideal can establish a method of challenging and questioning the dominance of the beauty ideal through physical expressions of anxiety and a focus on the spectacle of the body.

2.1.2 The Subversive Potential of the Grotesque Two-Bodied Image and the Positioning of Ugly Women as Evil

The movement Max Lüthi identifies between beauty and ugliness in the fairy tale can be explored further by considering Mikhail Bakhtin’s exploration of the two-bodied grotesque image in *Rabelais and His World* (1984). Bakhtin talks about the tendency of the grotesque image to show two bodies in one: “the one giving birth and dying, the other conceived, generated and born” (26). In the fairy tale this image is shown in the contrast between the good, beautiful women and the evil, ugly women. The combined image of the beautiful woman celebrating her marriage and in some cases the birth of a child at the same time that the ugly woman is punished, often with torture or death, creates a grotesque two-bodied image in the genre. For example, the focus on envy based purely in aesthetics, and the constant opposition described between Snow White and the queen creates a grotesque image that is only possible in tales of female conflict because it offers two bodies that together create the two-bodied grotesque image Bakhtin refers to.

Whereas the young Snow White represents beauty, life, and vivacity, she comes to power at the end of the tale at the same time that the queen is punished, dancing in heated iron shoes to her death. There is a combined image at the end of the Grimm version of Snow

White epitomizing beauty and power as the queen is stripped of her own power. The contrast between the wedding, representing new life, and the death of the queen through her punishment creates a distinctly grotesque image that would not be created if the queen had been allowed to live.

Psychoanalytic scholarship on the fairy tale approaches this antagonistic relationship and the death of the evil woman at the end of the tale as the cathartic release of anxiety and tension in the child reader. However, exploring how the grotesque functions in this relationship offers a different way to understand the use of violence and the association between good and evil with physical appearance. Rosemary Jackson in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981) argues that in relation to the concept of the ‘other’ as evil, “the other is defined as evil precisely because of his/her difference and a possible power to disturb the familiar and the known” (53-54). This possible power to disturb the familiar, which in the case of the fairy tale involves the feudal, patriarchal society and dominance of the beauty ideal for women, is depicted through the evil, grotesque women of the tales. The combination of the birth of new life for the beautiful woman as the ugly woman is killed creates a grotesque two-bodied image that becomes a commentary on how maintenance of the beauty ideal is problematic in the depiction of female relationships.

2.2 Beauty, Violence, and the Roots of Anxiety in the “Black and White Bride” Tale Type

The events of the grotesque sphere are always developed on the boundary dividing one body from the other and, as it were, at their points of intersection. One body offers its death, the other its birth, but they are merged in a two-bodied image. (Bakhtin 322)

Aspects of “The Black and White Bride” tale type can be found in many of the tales involving female conflict, whether the whole tale follows this typology or not. The name of the tale type itself intimates a division of opposites that cannot coexist, and this is the nature of this tale type. The white bride prospers by the end of the tale, as the black bride is punished, usually with death, for the transgressions she has committed in her attempts to take away the success of the white bride. This opposition between black and white, or good and bad in the fairy tale, creates an image that is reminiscent of Bakhtin’s two-bodied grotesque image. Rosemary Jackson argues that “any social structure tends to exclude as ‘evil’ anything radically different from itself or which threatens it with destruction” (52). In the fairy tale world, the dominant beauty ideal maintains a social hierarchy that privileges youth and beauty while punishing ugliness, which is always associated with negative moral traits in women such as deceit, trickery, and even murder. The ugly, evil women of the tales threaten the established social structure by attempting to gain a marriage for themselves that is beyond their reach because of their physical appearance. To punish them severely enough to maintain the social hierarchy, the torture and death of these women is combined with the wedding of the beautiful women, creating a two-bodied image that is intended to issue a warning to other ugly women who wish to transgress their social status. However, because of the grotesque combination of life and death in this two-bodied image, the threat of the evil woman and her eventual punishment also establish an aesthetic means of identifying the problematic female dynamic that is maintained with the constant reinforcement of the beauty ideal.

2.2.1 Physical Expressions of Anxiety and How They Emerge Based on the Inevitable Physical Comparison of Women

Ugliness, on its own, is rarely a point of contention in the fairy tale. However, when placed in comparison with beauty, envy and anxiety begin to arise in female relationships. In Basile's "Le tre fate" ("The Three Fairies"), envy stems primarily from the marked difference in appearances that privileges Cicella, indicating her eventual success before the story has even really started. This envy is cemented with the physical description of Cicella and her step-sister:

Caradonia, vedendo che Cicella, al paragone della figlia, si mostrava come un cuscino di velluto in quaranta accanto a uno strofinacciolo di cucina, uno specchio di venezia accanto a un culo di pentola unta, una fata Morgana di fronte a un'Arpia, cominciò a guardarla con cipiglio e a tenerla in gola

Caradonia, seeing that Cicella, in comparison with her own daughter, showed herself to be like a velvet pillow next to a little kitchen rag, a Venetian mirror next to the bottom of a greasy pan, and a Fata Morgana in front of a harpy, began to frown at her and hold it in her throat. (324-325)

Grannizia is a kitchen rag, the bottom of a greasy pan, and a harpy—but only in comparison to Cicella. It is the comparison of the two that makes Grannizia's ugliness so pronounced, while further elevating the beauty of Cicella, and this moment of comparison is exactly the point at which anxiety begins to exhibit itself. What pushes Caradonia to anxiety is not the appearance of her own daughter—it is the comparison between her daughter and Cicella. Upon making the comparison, Grannizia "cominciò a guardarla [Cicella] con cipiglio e a tenerla in gola" ("she began to frown at her and hold it in her throat"; 325). The unhappiness and the reference to indigestion as it relates to stomaching the appearance of Cicella are physical expressions of anxiety, and although this is a subtle reference, it points to an unease and distaste with the beauty ideal and the

success attached to it. Identifying this unease as anxiety rather than envy suggests a discomfort with the beauty ideal and subtly draws attention to the problematic presence of the beauty ideal for female characters.

In the Grimm's "The Three Little Gnomes in the Forest," another variation of the "Black and White Bride" tale type, a woman promises to spoil a man's daughter, so the girl convinces her father to marry the woman. The woman spoils her for two days, but after that "[t]he woman became her stepdaughter's most bitter enemy and tried to think of ways to make it worse for her from one day to the next. Moreover, she was envious because her stepdaughter was beautiful and lovely, and her own daughter was ugly and gruesome" (46). The Grimms label the woman's feelings as envy, but the woman's order that her stepdaughter leave to collect strawberries in the middle of winter and not return unless she fills her basket, suggests an unease regarding her stepdaughter's beauty and its potential to procure a better life. The tale works to perpetuate this anxiety by rewarding the beautiful daughter, reinforcing that she deserves her successful marriage while emphasizing that the stepmother and her biological daughter were justified in their anxious attempts to transgress the aesthetic and social boundaries placed upon them. The physical punishment at the end of both "Le tre fate" and "The Three Little Gnomes in the Forest" reinforces the ugly women's anxieties regarding the rewards of the beauty ideal and the punishments of the lack of that ideal.

2.2.2 How Violent Expressions of Anxiety Create a Grotesque Two-Bodied Image

If the physical comparison between the beautiful stepdaughter and the ugly daughter create initial feelings of anxiety in the mothers who realize their own biological

daughters do not measure up to the ideal of the fairy tale world, the dispersal of reward and punishment based largely on physical appearance, but associated also with morality, pushes that anxiety to its height and also creates a grotesque two-bodied image. In Basile's "Le tre fate," upon helping a group of fairies, Cicella is rewarded handsomely for her kindness and humble nature: "le fate, abbracciandola e mille volte baciandola, le misero un vestito magnifico, tutto ricamato d'oro; le acconciarono la testa alla scozzese, a canestretta e con tanti nastri e fettucce, che vedevi un prato di fiori" ("the fairies, hugging and kissing her thousands of times, put her in a magnificent dress all embroidered with gold. Then they decked out her hair like a Scotswoman's, with a basketful of ribbons and bindings, so that she looked like a field of flowers"; 327). After this, they lead her out through a golden door, and "come fu sotto l'arco della porta, levò la testa e le cadde una stella d'oro sulla fronte, ch'era una cosa bellissima" ("when she was under the arch of the door, she raised her head and there fell a golden star onto her forehead, and it was a thing of exquisite beauty"; 328). In the Grimm's "The Three Little Gnomes in the Forest," the beautiful daughter comes across three gnomes who she selflessly and politely helps, and they decide to reward her for her kindness with more beauty, the speech of gold pieces, and marriage to a king (47). In this way, her beauty is pushed past its conceived limit, as she becomes even more beautiful and magnificent than she was to begin with. However, it is not the reward that establishes conflict, but the comparison between the reward and the punishment given to the ugly daughters.

Upon seeing the rewards given to the beautiful daughters in both Basile and the Grimm's tale, the stepmothers are anxious for their own daughters to attain the same gifts. Caradonia sends Grannizia to get the same rewards as Cicella, but the fairies are

unimpressed by her cruelty and selfishness, so they send her out through the stable door: “alzata la testa passando sotto la porta, le cadde sulla fronte un testicolo d’asino, che si apprise alla pelle e pareva una voglia venuta alla madre quando era incinta di lei” (“raising her head as she passed through the door, there fell onto her forehead a donkey’s testicle, that attached itself to her skin as if it was the result of the pregnant cravings of her mother”; 328-329). Similarly, in the Grimm tale when the stepmother sends her own daughter to be rewarded, the daughter is cruel to the gnomes and is punished: “[s]he shall grow uglier with each day that passes. This is my gift,’ said the first one. ‘Each time she utters a word, a toad shall spring out of her mouth. This will be my gift,’ said the second. ‘She will die a miserable death. This will be my gift,’ said the third” (48). Not only are these girls punished, but in the same way that beauty is increased, their ugliness is increased so that they become even more unappealing than they were to begin with.

When she sees how her daughter has been transformed, Caradonia reacts in an extreme way: “gettò schiuma dalla bocca, e, rabbiosa come una cagna che ha partorito, fece subito spogliare Cicella, l’avvolse in un sozzo panno e le mandò a guardare i porci, mentre gli abbigliamenti di lei infronzolì la figliuola” (“foaming at the mouth and raging like a bitch that has given birth, she immediately made Cicella strip, wrapped her in a dirty cloth and sent her to watch the pigs. Then she dressed her own daughter in the frills and baubles”; 329). Anxiety and envy emerge through her excessive anger, as she forces her stepdaughter out of the beautiful clothes, giving them to her own daughter instead. In the Grimm version, “the stepmother was even more disturbed than before and could only think of how she might be able to hurt her husband’s daughter” (48). Anxiety pushes these mothers to react with excessive anger and a strong undercurrent of violence. The

angry stepmother taking the rewards of the beautiful daughter and giving them to her own daughter begins to establish a grotesque two-bodied image that will be completely realized at the end of the tale through a combination of marriage and violence.

2.2.3 Marriage and Murder: Using Physical Reward and Punishment to Reinforce the Fairy Tale Hierarchy

Caradonia hides Cicella in a barrel, intending to kill her once the lord has taken away Grannizia to marry her, but the prince is able to rescue Cicella and places Grannizia in the barrel instead, so that when Caradonia gets home and pours boiling water into the barrel, her daughter “*digrignó i denti come se avesse mangiato l’erba sardonica, e le si staccò la pelle come al serpente*” (“she gnashed her teeth as if she had eaten evil herbs and her skin peeled off like a snake’s”; 333). Caradonia intends to kill her stepdaughter but in a cruel twist of fate, murders her own daughter instead. Upon realizing that she has killed her own daughter, overcome with grief, Caradonia jumps into a well and breaks her neck (333). This all occurs right after the lord and Cicella have gone back to his home to get married. The combination of Grannizia being killed by her mother, who then commits suicide, with Cicella who has left the two women behind in order to marry the lord and pursue a better life creates a grotesque two-bodied image of Cicella and Grannizia. The reinforcement of Cicella’s rewards combined with the death of Grannizia is meant to be a commentary on the impossibility of physically and socially transgressing the boundaries imposed in the fairy tale hierarchy. Caradonia attempts to help her daughter escape her fate through violence, and is therefore punished with violence because of that attempt.

In the Grimm’s “The Three Little Gnomes in the Forest,” the stepmother similarly tries to push her own daughter into her stepdaughter’s new position as the king’s wife by

tossing her stepdaughter out of the window and putting her own daughter in the bed instead. However, a kitchen boy hears the young beautiful queen, now transformed into a duck telling her story and the king realizes what has happened. When the king asks the stepmother how someone who has thrown a princess into the water should be punished, she says that person should be “put into a barrel studded with nails on the inside [...] and then he should be rolled down the hill into the water” and this is how she and her daughter are killed (50). Although there is no mention of anxiety in this tale, the stepmother’s voicing of her own punishment in the Grimm tale suggests that she understands her transgression and the price she will pay because of it. The combined death of the stepmother and her daughter with the recent birth of a son to the beautiful stepdaughter again creates a grotesque two-bodied image in which life and death are merged in the fate of these two physically different sisters. The beautiful daughter easily transforms into a duck rather than being killed, but the stepmother cannot succeed in passing off her own daughter as a beautiful woman, and she is punished with death for attempting to change her daughter’s appearance and social position. The use of violence more extreme than the original transgression to punish this woman and her daughter points to an intense fear of these women succeeding in their attempts to take control of their own appearance and their fate, which would fundamentally alter the strict social and aesthetic hierarchy of the genre. However, what the Grimms intend to be a didactic lesson about the price of deceit and trickery also becomes a striking illustration that even with an awareness and anxiety over the inevitable failure of her attempts to secure a future for her daughter, the stepmother still tries to escape her inescapable fate.

2.2.4 How a Psychoanalytic Approach to Anxiety and Violence Becomes Problematic When Studying Female Relationships in Fairy Tales

Similar to its approach to the mother/stepmother dichotomy in fairy tales, psychoanalytic scholarship turns to a focus on the children of the tales in order to understand the presence and significance of anxiety. Maria Tatar in *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (1987) suggests that fairy tales “tell us about our deepest anxieties and desires” (xiv) but she approaches this from the perspective of children, arguing that

in the imaginative world opened up by fairy tales, children escape the drab realities of everyday life and indulge in the cathartic pleasures of defeating those giants, stepmothers, ogres, monsters, and trolls also known as the grown-ups. (xviii)

Anxiety exhibits itself in the tales as anxieties concerning childhood wishes and fears that are caused by the presence of adults. The defeat of those evil characters allows the child to deal with that anxiety in a harmless way, producing a cathartic release for the child reader. In *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1977), Bruno Bettelheim interprets the presence of the evil characters as the child's need to split a parent, or even him or herself, into two figures because of an inability to reconcile the positive affirmations of a parent with the strict punishments from the same parent. Bettelheim also touches on the traditional fairy tale ending in which the evil figure is destroyed, and what this means in relation to those childhood anxieties:

final success is experienced as meaningless by the child if his underlying unconscious anxieties are not also resolved. In the fairy tale, this is symbolized by the destruction of the evildoer. Without that, the hero's finally achieving his rightful place would not be complete, because if evil continued to exist, it would remain a permanent threat. (141)

Bettelheim and Tatar both identify a cathartic release of the child's anxieties, which is directly linked to the defeat of the villain in the tales. In addition to this, Bettelheim argues that the ultimate success of the 'good' character is meaningless if the child's unconscious anxieties remain unresolved, meaning that without the destruction of the villain, those anxieties will remain. With this approach to anxiety in the fairy tale, anxiety is closely linked with violence both as a way of representing and alleviating that anxiety and restoring balance at the end of the tale. What this fails to do is consider the anxieties of the women in the tales. It is the ugly, grotesque women, presented as evil, who exhibit anxiety based on the knowledge that their failure and death is inevitable. The cathartic release of anxiety for the child reader comes at the expense of these women's lives. Justification of this perpetuates the splitting of women into binaries of good and bad instead of challenging that binary by showing how both good and bad women combine in the tales to create a two-bodied image. This two-bodied image is not only more complex but also allows women themselves to challenge and comment on an ideal of beauty and behavior that is damaging to female relationships in the tales.

2.3 Spectacle, the Grotesque, and Challenging the Beauty Ideal

2.3.1 Defining Spectacle in Literary Fairy Tales

[W]hen they arrived, Marziella came out of the sea, and I don't believe that even the mother of that blind boy—he who, as that poet said, wants no other alms but tears—was as beautiful when she emerged from the waves. When the king's servant saw this he was dumbfounded and beside himself, and he ran back to his master to tell him of the lovely spectacle he had seen on the stage of the sea. ("Le due pizzelle" 347; Canepa translation of Basile)

Then she explored the house and eventually came to the forbidden chamber. But, oh, what did she see? Her two dear sisters lay there in the basin cruelly murdered and chopped to pieces. (Grimm, “Fitcher’s Bird” 157)

Spectacle in the fairy tale is used primarily in relation to two things: beauty, and violence. In “Through the Looking Glass: Fairy-Tale Cinema and the Spectacle of Femininity in *Stardust* and *The Brothers Grimm*,” Susan Cahill argues that “the realm of the visual [...] is one in which women are pitted against each other” (59). In the fairy tale films she analyzes, she suggests that the films “point to an abiding anxiety in relation to regulating the spectacle of the aging female body” (58). She continuously points out an anxiety on the part of the aging female characters, and more particularly with the artifice employed by these older women to maintain a youthful appearance (59). Spectacle in this sense relates to a performance, whether intentional or not, of the female characters in which the female body becomes a performance that is meant to be judged and critiqued based on the aesthetic standards of the genre. Although spectacle is largely a term used in film studies, it can also apply to the written tales through a focus on the extended descriptions of the ugly bodies that are dwelled on because of how they transgress the limits of the beauty ideal, and the reactions to any attempts to change that body to match the ideal.

2.3.2 The Two-Bodied Grotesque and the Function of Spectacle

In Pauline Greenhill’s article “Fitcher’s Queer Bird: A Fairy-Tale Heroine and Her Avatars” (2008), her discussion of the violence in the Grimm tale “Fitcher’s Bird” leads her to point out that “the dead women’s bodies become spectacular, both in the sense of the grotesque and in the sense of their presentation for the purpose of being seen to the horror of those who succeed them” (163). The function of spectacle in this case is

to draw attention to the violence so that the women who disobey the wizard's warning will dwell on the punishment of that disobedience. Traditionally the purpose for the violent punishment of women in fairy tales is approached either in a psychoanalytic or didactic way, arguing that the violence is a cautionary display that reinforces the desired behaviours and moral traits to depict positive role models for child readers, and to alleviate any anxieties on the part of the child reader through a harmless cathartic release. However, in "Quantifying the Grimm Corpus: Transgressive and Transformative Bodies in the Grimms' Fairy Tales" (2014), Jeana Jorgensen argues that "[t]hose who succeed these bloody, dismembered women include not only the characters unlocking bloody chambers but also the audience, driving home the point that violence against women is common, used as decoration as well as for more obvious punitive functions" (135). Jorgensen suggests here that violence against women can also be deliberately employed to create a spectacle of the female body, solely for the purpose of spectacle as a means of entertainment or delight. In addition to approaching spectacle and violence in fairy tales through a psychoanalytic approach as a means of dwelling on punishment, or strictly for the purpose of entertainment, the spectacle of violence can also function in this genre to challenge and subvert the dominance of the beauty ideal and the problematic association between being good and being beautiful. By focusing on how spectacle establishes an aesthetic comparison using the two-bodied grotesque image of the good beautiful woman and the evil ugly woman, it becomes clear that spectacle and the grotesque can work to challenge the dominance of the beauty ideal.

2.3.3 How the Desire to Consume Beauty Creates a Spectacle of the Female Body

There are specific methods of establishing spectacle in the written tales, based largely on elements of desire and consumption as they relate to female beauty. In Basile's tales, beauty is often described in gastronomic terms. In "I tre cedri" ("The Three Citrons") it is the sight of blood-stained ricotta that incites the prince to wish for a wife as beautiful as the red and white cheese, which he finally finds: "ed ecco gli restò in mano una giovinetta tenera e bianca come giuncata, con certe strisce di rosso che pareva un prosciutto d'Abruzzo o una soppressata di Nola" ("and there he found in his hand a young girl, tender and white as sweetened milk curds, with such streaks of red that she resembled a ham from Abruzzo, or a salami from Nola"; 527). Excessive beauty in Basile's tales is associated with food, and therefore indicated as something that is so desirable it must be consumed. As such, spectacle in these tales often deals with distortions of the body that are either incredibly appealing or grotesque enough to make one lose their appetite. When the prince in "I tre cedri" returns to his soon-to-be wife to find not her but an ugly slave instead, he reacts, "gonfio di bile e col muso lungo" ("full of bile and with a long face"; 530). This is very similar to the king in "La vecchia scorticata" ("The Old Woman Who Was Skinned") who when he realizes he has slept with a grotesque old woman instead of a young beautiful girl, exclaims, "io, che credevo di trangugiarmi una vitelluzza lattante, mi son trovato ai denti una placenta di bufala" ("I, who believed I was swallowing a little baby milk calf, find myself with a buffalo placenta between my teeth"; 104). He goes further, saying "m'immaginavo di avere un boccone da re, e mi trovo sotto il naso questa sudiceria mastica-e-sputa!" ("I imagined I had a morsel for a king, and I find under my nose this filth—chew it and spit it out!"; 104). Basile's

use of gastronomic terms points out how the beauty ideal affects men and women differently in the genre. The references to disgust and indigestion are physical expressions of anxiety, but in this case are exhibited by the male characters in reaction to the ugly women of the tales. It is very clear in Basile that appearance is something to be consumed, and it can be as sweet as a spoonful of honey, or as gag inducing as a buffalo placenta. In this way, women and their beauty are associated with consumption when observed by male characters, and their desirability is expressed through these striking descriptions that incite feelings of hunger or nausea in the reader. The king's anxiety is presented as justified in both "I tre cedri" and "La vecchia scorticata," but when the anxiety is felt by the women of the tales, the anxiety over the inaccessibility of the beauty ideal changes from a desire for beauty to a desire for power and success that will otherwise not be available to the ugly women of the tales.

The Grimm tales, on the other hand, often associate beauty with wealth and precious metals, and as such, spectacle in these tales is on a more superficial level than the bodily expressions of Basile. In "All Fur," the princess who escapes the desires of her incestuous father manages to get herself married to a king by catching his attention with beautiful dresses and golden objects. She entices him with three dresses resembling the sun, moon, and one "as bright as the stars," in addition to a golden ring, a golden spinning wheel, and a golden reel (240-242). In "Cinderella," she catches the prince's attention because of her gold and silver dresses, and silk slippers, which gradually become more and more exquisite, and because she outshines all the other women, she is chosen to marry the prince in the end. Max Lüthi points out in *The Fairytale as Art Form and Portrait of Man* (1984) that "gold is for the fairy tale the expression of the highest

degree of beauty” (15), and in the case of the Grimm tales, this is shown again and again. Descriptions of ugly women are mentioned only in passing, such as in “The Three Little Gnomes in the Forest,” in which the woman’s daughter is described as “ugly and gruesome” (46). There is something dull and lifeless about the ugly girls in these tales, which indicates their unattractiveness effectively, in a world where glittering jewels and sparkling dresses are the highest indicators of beauty. Similarly, bodily expressions of anxiety are not as marked as they are in Basile, but they still emerge, often through fidgeting or physical discomfort that is not as dwelled on as it is in Basile’s tales. Spectacle in the Grimm tales is shown not through expressions of desire for food and consumption, but through decoration and brilliance. It exhibits itself in a much more superficial manner than in Basile, and the anxiety felt is therefore also shown as a superficial change to the body.

2.3.4 Transforming Appearance to Create a Spectacle of the Female Body

In Basile’s “La vecchia scorticata” (“The Old Woman Who Was Skinned”) spectacle is used to deceive, to reward and to punish. Although the only female relationship is destroyed at the end of the tale, the presence of the grotesque in the many transformations that occur within this tale create a dialogue between the beauty ideal and the grotesque in order to challenge the dominance of that ideal. The tale begins with two old women, who are “il riassunto delle disgrazie” (“the summary of misfortunes”; 99), and hide their grotesque bodies in a set of rooms underneath the window of a king, who hears all of their complaining, and assumes “che là, sotto a lui, dimorasse la quintessenza delle cose gentili, il primo taglio delle carni fini, e il fior fiore del tenerume” (“that there,

underneath him, lived the quintessence of gentleness, the prime cut of fine meats, and the cream of tenderness”; 99). Already a two-bodied image has come into effect, as the king imagines the most delicate beauty possible, and behind the door there are instead two grotesque and ugly old women. This establishes a dialogue between the beauty ideal imagined by the king, and the actual appearance of the two old women by combining the ideal and the grotesque reality of their bodies into a two-bodied image. His craving to meet these two ‘delicate beauties’ obsesses him to such a point that finally he convinces the women to show him one finger in eight days. While the king wishes desperately for the days to pass as quickly as possible, the two sisters occupy themselves by “*come speciale che ha versato lo scioppo, succhiarsi le dita*” (“sucking their fingers like an apothecary who has spilled syrup”; 100), and on the eighth day, the oldest, who has the smoother finger, shows it to the king (100-101). Spectacle begins in this tale with the deception of the two women, who, worried about disappointing the king, transform their bodies to match, as well as they can, the young soft bodies that he is expecting. A spectacle is made out of their attempts at transformation, and the grotesque is very present in this desire of the two women to alter their ugly, aging bodies in such a way that it will create the illusion of the beauty ideal the king is imagining. There is also a hint of anxiety at the prospect of not measuring up to the king’s imagined ideal of their appearance, which results in a grotesque transformation of the body to mimic the ideal and thus avoid punishment.

The first deception is successful, and the king then demands to meet with the older sister in person, which she agrees to, but only on the condition that not even one candle be lit, as “*non mi sostiene il cuore di esser vista nuda!*” (“my heart cannot bear to

be seen naked!"; 103). Again, when it is time to meet with the king, the woman employs deception to create the illusion of a younger body: "spianatesi tutte le grinze della persona e, tirandole, fattone un nodo dietro le spalle, che legò stretto con un capo di spago" ("she smoothed all of the wrinkles on her body and, pulling them back, made a knot behind her shoulders, which she tied tightly with a piece of twine"; 103). Once again the woman resorts to physically molding her body into a shape that will measure up to the king's ideal, making a spectacle out of her transformation while also drawing attention to the impossibility of the beauty ideal. Her deception is further aided by the king dousing himself in cologne, which lucky for her, means "non gli fece sentire il fetore della bocca, il lezzo delle ascelle e la mofeta di quella brutta cosa" ("he could not smell the stench of her mouth, the reek of her armpits and the stench of that ugly thing"; 103). Nancy Canepa translates this passage in the following way: "he wasn't able to smell the fumes coming from her mouth, the stink of her little tickly areas, and the stench of that ugly thing" (Canepa, *Giambattista Basile's The Tale of Tales* 119). Canepa's translation from the original Neapolitan describes "the stink of her little tickly areas," but Croce's translation into Italian alters it slightly to be "the reek of her armpits." In his description of the grotesque body, Bakhtin argues that "the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose" (26). Basile's use of metaphor often draws attention to grotesque aspects of the body, most often the mouth and the genital organs. However, with Croce's translation, Basile's indirect reference to the old woman's genitals is changed slightly, taking away from the grotesque image of the body that is created with Basile's original description. The sweet smell of the king's cologne and his mistaken

perception that he is sleeping with a young beautiful woman is contrasted strongly in this description with the reality of the old woman's grotesque appearance, creating a two-bodied undercurrent regarding the ideal and the reality of the woman. She seeks to use the cover of darkness to assist her in maintaining the illusion she is attempting to create by stretching and altering the boundaries of her body in order to fit an ideal that she physically has no access to. The king aids this woman's performance of the beauty ideal by choosing not to question the feel of her body once they lie down together: "palpando, dell'imbroglia dietro le spalle e delle pelli aggrinzite e delle vesciche flosce che pendevano dalla bottega della malcapitata vecchia" ("he felt the tangle behind her shoulders, the wrinkled skin and flabby bladder that was hanging in the shop of the unfortunate old woman"; 103-104). The king notices the tied up skin but chooses to ignore it until after he has slept with her. The old woman plays into the ideal the king is imagining and knows how to manipulate her body to mimic the beauty she does not have, but there is an undercurrent of anxiety to these transformations which will be severely punished if the king discovers her true appearance.

The Grimm tale "All Fur" also explores the ability of a woman to transform her physical appearance, but in this tale it involves a woman trying to hide her beauty. It begins with a dying queen's request to her husband that "if you desire to marry again after my death, I'd like you to take someone who is as beautiful as I am and who also has golden hair like mine" (239). This immediately creates an anxiety in the king to find a wife who will measure up to the beauty of his first wife, but also creates anxiety in his daughter, because of her mother's wishes. After searching far and wide, the king comes to the conclusion that "I'm going to marry my daughter, for she is the living image of my

dead wife” (239). Here again there is a hint of a two-bodied grotesque image.

Allerleirauh is both her own version of the beauty ideal and the image of her dead mother, and the combination of these two images by the king produces an anxiety in the girl that cannot easily be assuaged without an effort to change her physical appearance. After making demands the girl thinks her father would never be able to fulfill, she is forced to run away from home, and “put on the cloak of all kinds of fur, and blackened her face and hands with soot” (240). Similar to the old women in Basile, the girl’s attempt is to conceal her appearance, but here it is because she wishes to hide her beauty, rather than to make herself appear more beautiful. Spectacle is used in this case to create an illusion that is meant to disguise beauty rather than to emphasize it. Allerleirauh does not stretch or distort her body in any way, instead applying things artificially to herself, such as the soot and the cloak of fur. This is a much simpler transformation of the body than the sucking of fingers and tying back of skin employed by the old women, but perhaps it is also a commentary on the beautiful body, and by extension, the beauty ideal. Her anxiety stems not from a desire to appear beautiful, but from the very fact that she is so beautiful, which shows the danger of excessive beauty because of its ability in this case to incite the incestuous desire of her father. Allerleirauh immediately realizes the danger of her beauty and seeks to mask it, but in doing so she becomes a spectacle because of her animal-like appearance, pointing to the fact that in either extreme, a woman’s body is made into a spectacle, whether she intends it or not.

2.3.5 How the Grotesque and Spectacle Combine to Challenge the Beauty Ideal

When the old woman is tossed out of the window in Basile's tale by the furious king, a group of fairies happen to pass by and burst into laughter at the ridiculous sight. Here, the woman's body is again part of a performance, but one she has not entered into intentionally. Upon seeing the woman hanging from a tree, the fairies "furono sovrapprese da un riso così violento che stettero per scoppiare" ("were drowned by a laughter so violent that they almost burst"; 105), and to reward this woman for the enjoyment she has given them, they transform her into a "giovane, bella, ricca, nobile, virtuosa, amata e fortunata" ("young, beautiful, rich, noble, virtuous, well-loved and fortunate"; 105) girl. If the woman fails in her attempts to make herself appear younger, she succeeds in evoking laughter from the beautiful fairies, which leads to her transformation into the very person she was trying to present herself as. Although the fairies transform the woman without her permission, the position of this woman as grotesque spectacle becomes a position of power, from which she transforms into the beauty ideal she was attempting to portray. This position of power is solidified when, upon seeing the transformed woman the king begs and pleads for her to marry him. A two-bodied image is now established at the end of the tale with the transformed woman's wedding to the king, which she invites her old and ugly sister to. The combination of a young beautiful woman at her wedding celebrating the new life she is about to embark on is contrasted against, in this case, her aging and ugly sister, who wishes to know the secret of the transformation. If at the beginning of the tale, these sisters are equals and seem to get along despite their grouchy dispositions, now the scale has been tipped and the beautifully transformed sister incites only anxiety in her old and grotesque relation.

The envy of the second sister transforms into an anxiety towards attaining the beauty that her sister has achieved—a desire that will be shown to be not only impossible, but also punishable, very similar to the way the older sister was punished in her initial attempts to change her appearance.

Basile gradually builds up the scene in which the ugly sister attempts to discern how her sister transformed by following the course of a meal, which emphasizes the desire for consumption of beauty, and slowly draws out the anxiety as well. It also creates the culmination of the focus on the female body as spectacle in the tale, as the ugly sister's continuous desire to know how her sister transformed, along with the extended and extravagant feast, creates a double image of the extensive amount of food being equated with the ugly sister's desperate desire to possess beauty as appealing as the feast is. Upon asking the first time what her sister did, the transformed beauty, trying to distract her new husband, tells him her sister wants a little green sauce, and "*il re fece subito venire agliata, mostarda e pepeta, e cento altre salsettine da stuzzicare l'appetito*" ("the king immediately ordered garlic, mustard and pepper sauce, and a hundred other sauces to whet the appetite"; 108). For the old woman, "*la salsa di mostacciulo pareva fiele di vacca*" ("the mustard sauce seemed like cow bile"; 108), but it does stimulate her appetite—just not in the way it was intended, as it only increases her desire to know what her sister did. Upon her husband again asking what the sister wants, this time she says sweets, and "*subito fioccarono le pastidelle, affluirono le cialde e le ciambellette, diluviò il biancomangiare, piovvero a cielo aperto i franfellicchi*" ("immediately there was a storm of pastries, a pouring down of waffles and little doughnuts, a flood of blancmange, and a raining of franfellicchi"; 108). Following the course of a meal, the sister moves

from stimulants of the appetite to sweets, “ma la vecchia, che aveva il granchio in corpo e le viscere in rivolta” (“but the old woman, who had crabs in her body and whose bowels were revolting”; 108) continues to ask her sister what she did. The physical expressions of anxiety in the old woman’s bodily discomfort and indigestion create a spectacle of her grotesque body, constantly placed in contrast with the beautiful transformed body of her sister, maintaining a two-bodied image. Finally, irritated with her sister and wishing to end the conversation, the beautiful girl mutters, “mi sono scorticata, sorella mia!” (“I skinned myself, sister”; 108), to which the old woman replies, “ne voglio anch’io la parte mia fino a un finocchio!” (“I also want my part, up to the fennel!”; 109). As Nancy Canepa notes in her translation of the tales, fennel was served at the end of a meal (123), and with the end of this meal, the anxious sister gets the information she has been begging for, and promptly heads off to the closest barber to be skinned.

The grotesque and the limits of the body are taken to their height at the end of the tale, in which one sister celebrates her transformation and wedding to a king as the other dies in her attempts to achieve the same thing. Although her death by skinning is gruesome, the contrast between the two women and the difference in their interactions from the beginning of the tale, when they are on equal footing, to the end of the tale, where one clearly has an advantage over the other, points to an imbalance in power based on physical appearance that is not only arbitrary, but dangerous when it comes to establishing and maintaining female relationships. It is the constant interaction of these two ‘opposite’ women that repeatedly reinforces the harmful presence of the beauty ideal while also pointing out the impossibility of that ideal, which can be achieved only through magical means. This use of magic as the successful means of transformation

takes away any control the woman has over her ability to change her own appearance, but the continued attempts of first the older sister and then her younger sister, up to the point of death, point to an insistence in these women to continuously challenge the lack of control female characters have when it comes to the prevalence of the beauty ideal. It also emphasizes the desperate anxiety of the ugly woman, who is willing to attempt anything, including skinning herself, to escape her fate in the genre.

Whereas the two extremes are exhibited in two women in the Basile tale, in the Grimm tale there is only one woman through which the grotesque and the beauty ideal are explored. *Allerleirauh* is discovered by a group of huntsmen, who describe her as “a strange animal lying in the hollow tree. We’ve never seen anything like it. Its skin is made up of a thousand different kinds of fur, and it’s lying there asleep” (240). Spectacle and the attempts to create the illusion of a body different from her natural one are similar to the old women here, although the transformation and illusion are on a more superficial level. *Allerleirauh*’s possession of the beauty ideal implies that regardless of her difficulties, she will still find a successful marriage, whereas the old women face death or torture without the intervention of a magical transformation that will save them from their fate. The king agrees to take her back to his castle and offers her work in the kitchens, and so the maiden passes her time this way until a ball is held in the castle. Up to this point, the girl becomes a spectacle not because of her beauty, but because of the strange fur cloak she wears to disguise her true appearance, but this draws little attention to her, apart from when she is at the tree stump and the king’s men discover her. Hardly any emphasis is placed on her as a grotesque spectacle. Instead, her beauty is established as the source of spectacle that will allow her to succeed by the end of the tale. At the first

ball, the girl asks the cook if she can watch for a while and the cook agrees, at which point the girl “took off her fur cloak, and washed the soot from her face and hands so that her full beauty came to light again,” putting on one of the dresses she has brought with her, and astonishing the guests with her beauty, inciting love and desire in the king (240). *Allerleirauh* in this case begins by hiding her beauty because of the incestuous desires of her father, attempting to mask the beauty ideal that she possesses in order to save herself. However, at the ball she reveals that beauty in its entire splendor to catch the attention of the king. Excessive beauty as spectacle is used intentionally to help her, and she does so with an awareness of the power of the beauty ideal in the fairy tale world. After she dances with the king, she puts back on her disguise and makes “a bread soup as best she could,” dropping a gold ring into it (241). Here the consumption of beauty is present, but if in *Basile* it focuses entirely on food, here it is inferred that the beauty has more to do with the desire inspired not by the soup, but by the ring that is placed inside it. Similar to the nature of spectacle in this tale, which is represented by the golden items rather than by the food, the transformation of the princess is on a superficial level, as she merely washes the soot from her face and changes her clothing in order to reveal her beauty. This shallow transformation points to the inaccessibility of the beauty ideal but in a more subtle way. This woman is able to use the grotesque to mask her beautiful appearance because of a choice she is making, but whereas the old woman is punished by the king for masking her appearance, in this case the girl is rewarded for hiding her true beauty. The only female opposition to *Allerleirauh* is her beautiful mother at the beginning of the tale, further emphasizing the cyclic nature of the fairy tale genre in perpetuating beauty for some women and completely excluding it for others. On a purely aesthetic level both

Basile and the Grimm brothers use the female body to create wonder and disgust as a means of entertainment. However, this focus on appearances also ends up commenting on the prevalence of the beauty ideal and the consequences of maintaining a physical hierarchy based on beauty.

2.4 Moving towards the Ultimate Subversion of the Beauty ideal in Fairy Tale Films

At the end of “La vecchia scorticata,” in an attempt to become just as beautiful as her sister, the old woman goes to a barber and demands that he skin her, her dying words being, “l’invidia, figliuol mio, se stessa macera” (“envy, my son, consumes itself”; 109). If the old woman was content before to complain and bemoan her fate along with her equally ugly and grotesque sister, once that sister is transformed, she becomes obsessed with attaining the same level of beauty, to the extent that she kills herself. Envy and anxiety conflate when it comes to a desire for beauty and the beauty ideal that is so easily rewarded in these tales, creating a gruesome fate for any woman who seeks to attain the beauty that has not naturally been ascribed to her from birth. There is an implicit warning that any attempts to conceal or change one’s natural appearance will be punished, and this punishment points to a danger regarding the performance of the beauty ideal in comparison with the ‘natural’ possession of it. The continued presence of a double bodied image of the beautiful woman entering a new life as the ugly woman dies creates a grotesque undercurrent that is present in many of the tales involving female conflict.

This chapter has explored how the beauty ideal interacts with the more violent aspects of the grotesque in a variety of written tales, in order to establish that while this has often been looked at through the lens of psychoanalytic scholarship, approaching it

through an aesthetic lens will raise new questions to address when looking at the fairy tale genre. While the old sister is being skinned she continuously mutters to herself, “chi bella vuol parere, pena vuol sostenere” (“she who wants to appear beautiful, must suffer”; 109), and this statement hints at an underlying anxiety regarding female beauty and the maintenance of a youthful appearance, as the ominous ticking clock pushes women towards old age and a loss of beauty that inevitably indicates a loss of power in the fairy tale world.

There is something grotesque about the descriptions of these women, who in an attempt to make themselves look younger and more beautiful, are instead critiqued and ridiculed because of it. However, as Basile argues at the beginning of “La vecchia scorticata,” if a young girl deserves reproach for such attempts, an old woman is even more worthy of punishment for this ‘crime.’ What this points to is an anxiety regarding the ability of women to use spectacle towards their own aims, in order to challenge and crumble the hierarchy based on beauty that dominates the genre. The fear of appearances not being what they seem is one that is prominent in the Baroque time period, but it makes its way into the 21st century as well. In the following chapter I will look at how the medium of film has allowed the fairy tale genre, in the 21st century, to take this fear of appearances to another level by hyper-aestheticizing the female body in such a way that issues of appearance and female representation are forced into confrontation with a beauty ideal that has dominated the genre for too many years.

Chapter 3

3 Fairy Tale Films and the Important Role Aesthetics Plays in Creating a Visual Language to Challenge the Dominance of the Beauty Ideal

3.1 Defining the Fairy Tale in Film

In recent years, there have been an increasing number of Hollywood films that use the fairy tale genre as their basis, which in present day society have become more popular in many instances than their literary counterparts. How does the fairy tale change in these 21st century depictions, and with the use of a new medium? In *The Enchanted Screen:*

The Unknown History of Fairy Tale Films (2011), Jack Zipes defines the fairy tale film as

any kind of cinematic representation recorded on film, on videotape, or in digital form that employs motifs, characters, and plots generally found in the oral and literary genre of the fairy tale, to re-create a known tale or to create and realize cinematically an original screen-play with recognizable features of a fairy tale. (9)

The fairy tale film, in this way, can be defined according to specific motifs and typologies that are characteristic of the fairy tale genre. Because of this, traditional elements of the genre regarding the moral split of women into good and bad based solely on their appearances are also a focus of the films, in addition to the dynamics in female relationships involving envy and anxiety that are characteristic of the written tales. Zipes later goes on to say,

[f]idelity to a so-called original text or hypotext is irrelevant because, first, it is impossible to be true to any source or text and, second, the entire purpose of adaptation is to renew, re-create, and re-present a commonly shared tale from one's own perspective. Every filmic adaptation of a fairy tale is a re-creation to be judged on its own merits and, of course, within the context of a critical standards and position-taking by artists, critics, and audiences in a given culture and period. (11)

Zipes argues that fidelity to the original text is irrelevant, however the necessity of recognized character traits and typological elements and motifs suggests that even in a visual medium the fairy tale can be identified based on characteristics that have become recognizable of the written genre. The timeless nature of elements such as the prevalence of the beauty ideal, and the plot typologies suggest that fidelity to an original text can be relevant when studying this genre to determine whether these elements of the tales really are static and timeless or whether, with modern interpretations, there is room to challenge some of the problematic traditional elements of the tales.

3.1.1 Typology, Aesthetics and the Grotesque: Locating the Space to Challenge Traditional Representations of Women in Fairy Tale Films

There are three points to consider when looking at how the traditional typology of the genre changes in film. First, is how much previous knowledge of the tale being referenced is necessary in order to understand what the writers and director are attempting to re-write or change completely in the film version. How much the film relies on previous knowledge of a tale, and whether the film then proceeds according to that original text or diverts from it, is one aspect to explore in regards to determining how the medium of film can challenge the dominance of the beauty ideal in female relationships. From this initial typological viewpoint it is possible to establish whether the film intends to adhere to a traditional plot and set of characters, or whether it intends to question the genre by changing the basic elements that have become characteristic of it.

Second, the medium of film itself also offers space in which to negotiate issues of female relationships and the prevalence of the beauty ideal, through a focus on aesthetics. In Chapter Two I explored how an aesthetic approach to the tales can interpret violence

in the genre as a means of challenging the beauty ideal and attempting to take control over women's representation of their own body. Because of the visual nature of the medium, the films provide an even more potent space in which issues of female beauty, anxiety, and violence can be explored on a purely aesthetic level. Similar to the written tales, sometimes the medium of film works to reinforce traditional depictions because of the film's focus on making the woman into a spectacle. From a psychoanalytic perspective, film often depicts inequalities in representations of gender: women are looked at; men look. The idea with this approach to the woman as spectacle is to explore how women are presented as the passive object of the gaze, and the lack of space for female power because they are not the active agents of the gaze. In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1989) Laura Mulvey talks about the gendered aspects of the gaze and the object of the gaze when it comes to film. According to Mulvey,

[i]n a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. (19)

Similar to its approach to anxiety in the fairy tale, a psychoanalytic interpretation of the role of women in film focuses on issues of the audience in their reception of the tale. However, the medium of film can also work to explore and explode the issues of the woman as object of the gaze. In the fairy tale film, there is a hyper-awareness of the woman as spectacle, offering this aestheticized position more and more as a space of subversion and power rather than the passive and powerless position of "to-be-looked-at-ness." This hyper-awareness allows the medium of film to openly challenge the importance of the beauty ideal as it has been maintained in the written tales.

Third, the role of the grotesque in this hyper-aestheticized position of women in fairy tale films, and especially the female body as it relates to spectacle can also work to challenge the traditional representation of women in fairy tales. By comparing the written texts to the films' retellings, exploring the use of aesthetics to visually establish a dialogue with the traditions, and the use of the grotesque to successfully break the fairy tale dichotomy of good/bad, beautiful/ugly women, this chapter will explore how the fairy tale in 21st century film has successfully challenged and begun to question the dominance of the beauty ideal in the genre. The use of a visual medium and an emphasis on the aesthetic spectacle of the female body has begun to establish a different narrative regarding women and female relationships in the fairy tale.

3.2 The Female Active Gaze and the Threat of Grotesque Transformation in *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters*

3.2.1 Adhering to the Typology and Visually Beginning to Change the Narrative

Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters, released in 2013 and written and directed by Tommy Wirkola, strays quite spectacularly from the Grimm version. It begins with a five minute re-telling of the Grimm tale, suggesting that a pre-knowledge of the original tale is necessary in order to recognize the subversive elements that will be presented in the film. The written tale begins with a poor woodcutter and his wife who decide to take their children into the forest and leave them, because the famine sweeping the country has made it impossible for them to continue supporting their entire family (Grimm 53). In this version, the mother acts as a precursor to the witch, who is the real villain of the tale. The mother's insistence that they abandon their children in the forest while the father is

saddened by the thought of leaving them, establishes the older female figure as the villain from the beginning of the tale, which is carried through to the witch when the children come upon her cottage. The film follows this pattern, beginning with the father rushing into the cottage as the mother tells him, “take them into the forest, now!” (*Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters*). When Hansel and Gretel in the written tale discover the house made of bread, cake and sugar, the old woman who finds them nibbling at her house welcomes them warmly, feeding them sweets and luring them into the house in order to “kill, cook, and eat them” (57). In this version, the witch’s house “was made of bread [and] it had cake for a roof and pure sugar for windows” (56). What originally sounds like a sweet and charming house is made sinister from the beginning of the film.

Although brightly coloured and dripping with sweets and icing, the dark colouring of the surrounding woods combined with the gaping mouth-like door that looks as though it is about to eat Hansel and Gretel as they enter the witch’s house, suggests a foreshadowing of what is about to happen (Fig. 1). Previous knowledge of the written tale already suggests what is about to occur, but a sense of anxiety is maintained in the scene with the dark colouring and threatening image of the door.



Figure 1: Entrance to the witch's house, *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters*, 2013

The film in this prologue follows the typology of the written tale as Aarne-Thompson defines it: “[t]he parents abandon their children in the wood. The gingerbread house. The boy fattened; the witch thrown into the oven” (117). It is in the visual depiction of the Grimm’s written tale that a change in how the story is told is established, rather than through the narration of the tale. The film begins with an acknowledgement of the traditional typology of the written tale, but the opening credits in a cartoon, animated style show the growth of Hansel and Gretel into adults and moves beyond the typology to explore what else is possible in this genre. What is the ending of the written tale is just the beginning of the film, which proceeds to explore the progression of Hansel and Gretel’s new career as bounty hunters, intent on killing all witches and protecting innocent children.

3.2.2 Undermining Traditional Narrative by Transforming the Female Gaze from Passive to Active

After the opening credits, the scene pans out from a close-up of a missing child advertisement on a milk bottle to a small village in which the sheriff has put a woman on stage who he claims to be a witch. The film begins with a very obvious positioning of the female body as spectacle, in the traditional role of passive object to be looked at. The woman, Mina, offers a verbal challenge to the sheriff accusing her of being a witch: “go to hell”; but her drowned appearance, soft gold colouring, and the fact that she is being held back by two men visually maintain that she is in a passive position (Fig. 2).



Figure 2: Mina accused of being a witch, *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters*, 2013

Screaming that “this woman will burn,” the sheriff is silenced by the large barrel of a gun pointed at his head, held by Gretel, who says to him, “let the girl go, or I’m gonna blow your sheriff’s brains all over these fucking hillbillies” (*Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters*). In addition to the assertive language Gretel uses, an aesthetic contrast between Gretel and Mina is immediately established. Gretel commands attention, dressed all in black, and she is first seen holding a gun to the startled sheriff’s neck (Fig. 3).

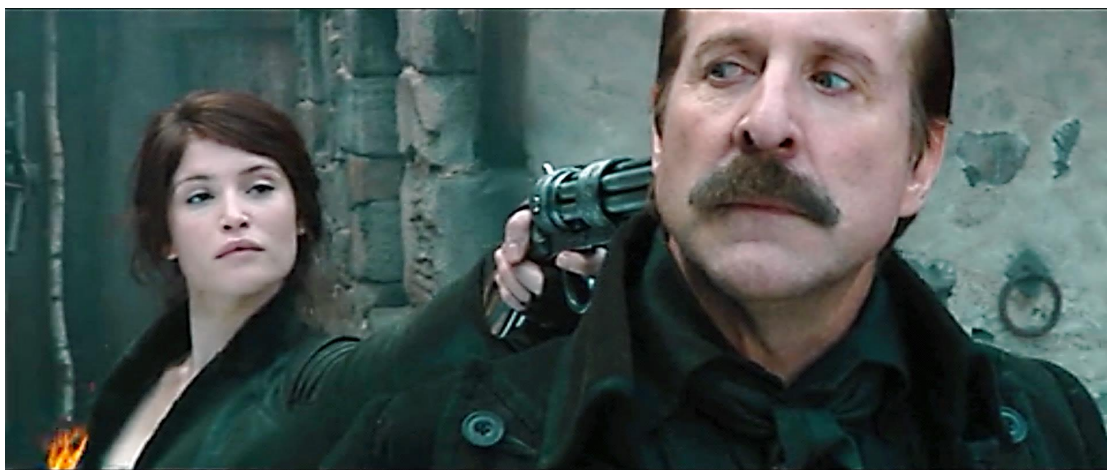


Figure 3: Gretel threatening the Sheriff, *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters*, 2013

Although Gretel also becomes an object of spectacle, she does so precisely because of how she differs from the traditional fairy tale heroine represented by Mina. Both women are still on a literal and figurative stage at this point in the film, and in this way are

doubly made into a spectacle. Mina, representing the traditional fairy tale heroine, is contrasted against Gretel, representing a new kind of female protagonist in the genre that cannot be as strictly labelled as her predecessors. This establishes a dynamic between the two women that is not based on strict binaries, offering something different regarding female representation in the genre.

The role of the gaze is also important in establishing ways through which the traditional representations of women and the beauty ideal can be challenged. Whereas Mina is doubly the passive object to be looked at, both by the villagers and by the film's audience, Gretel commands her own gaze within the film as she looks actively at the sheriff. The intentional association of Mina with cream and gold colours in the film reinforces her as an object of spectacle to be looked at. The continuous dressing of Gretel in darker colours creates a space of ambiguity for her as a female character, thus offering a new depiction of the female protagonist that does not depend on a strict association between beauty and goodness. Steve Neale argues in *Cinema and Technology: Sound and Colour* (1985) that spectacle and colour in film can become closely linked through representations of the female body. Neale argues that "women within patriarchal ideology already occupy the contradictory spaces both of nature and culture" and as such female representation can combine the use of colour as both spectacle and realism, which, according to Neale, otherwise do not coexist in film (152). In this way, Gretel becomes both a depiction of reality through the darker colouring of her clothing, but is still presented as spectacle in a way that differs from the representation of Mina. If the colouring is not enough to place Gretel in a new position within the fairy tale as occupying an active rather than passive role, the gun she is holding serves to solidify this.

Right after the introduction of Gretel, Hansel checks Mina for physical signs as he says to the crowd, “when a woman truly deals in witchcraft she cannot hide it. A nasty rot sets in: it shows in her teeth, her skin, and her eyes. This is not a witch. This woman is clean” (*Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters*). The film positions Hansel as the narrator of the tale, taking away from the agency of the female characters, while also pointing out that a characteristic element of the fairy tale genre is still in place: a woman’s morality, her ‘good’ or ‘bad’ moral standing, will still be evident based on her physical appearance. It is perhaps no coincidence that Hansel utters these words immediately after the appearance of Gretel, in which he attempts to maintain that although Gretel may be different from the typical fairy tale heroine, her physical beauty still places her in the same position as Mina. The film proceeds however, to prove him wrong.

3.2.3 Using the Grotesque Two-Bodied Image to Subvert the Strict Moral Association with Beauty to Create Less Binary Depictions of Women

The maintenance of clear physical demarcations of good and bad in the film are simultaneously reinforced and complicated with the witches. The film’s rendition of the witch who tricks Hansel and Gretel into entering her house acknowledges the written Grimm tale, but then expands on it. In the Grimm version, “[s]uddenly the door opened, and a very old woman leaning on a crutch came slinking out of the house” (56). Only after the Grimms go on to explain that this old woman is actually “a wicked witch” do they mention that “witches have red eyes and cannot see very far, but they have a keen sense of smell, like animals” (57), suggesting a direct link between the moral position of this witch and her physical appearance. The director transforms the Grimm’s very old woman with red eyes and a keen sense of smell into the grotesque, animal-like women

whose bodies transgress their limits in multiple ways. The ‘original’ witch of the beginning re-telling in the film is the closest to the Grimm tale, shown as a very old woman with her balding hair, rotted teeth, and severely wrinkled face (Fig. 4).

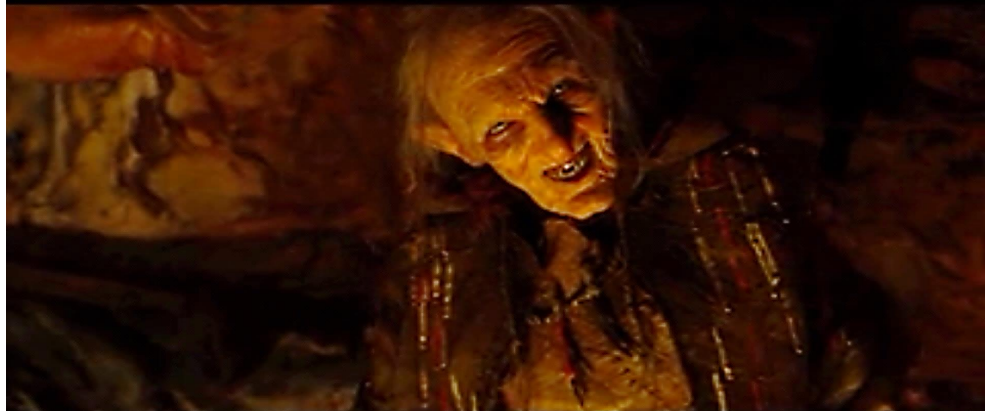


Figure 4: The witch, who captures the children, *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters*, 2013

The witches get progressively more grotesque as the film continues, culminating in the carnivalesque celebration at the end of the film, in which the witches gather under a blood moon to drink the blood of young children, in order to become immortal and immune to fire. These witches range from a set of conjoined twins to a woman without a lower body, including a wide array of women who in some way or another have challenged the limits of the body. However, if the grotesque bodies of the witches work only to create an aesthetic spectacle simply for entertainment, Muriel, the Grand Witch, offers the subversive potential that Bakhtin refers to in his discussion of the grotesque. Muriel’s positioning as a Grand Witch means that unlike her inferior counterparts, she can alter her appearance to mask her ‘true’ grotesque witch’s face with a more beautiful visage. It is this potential to alter her body at will that makes Muriel not only more grotesque than the other witches of the film, but also more powerful, as this ability to

control her own physical appearance makes her more threatening in the fairy tale genre (Fig. 5, 6).



Figure 5: Muriel as the beautiful Grand Witch, *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters*, 2013



Figure 6: Muriel as the grotesque Grand Witch, *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters*, 2013

Although she, like her literary predecessors will end up dead, her easy transition between beauty and the grotesque points, on a purely aesthetic level, to the perceived threat of a woman in control of her own appearance and the representation of that appearance in the fairy tale genre. With the presence and difference in appearance of Muriel, Mina and Gretel, the film comments, on a purely aesthetic level, on the traditional depiction of

women in the genre through Mina, the potential in modern interpretations to offer a new protagonist who is not completely good but not completely evil in Gretel, and the powerful role that aesthetics and a woman's appearance plays in the genre through Muriel. Although the film overall maintains a traditional fairy tale trajectory, the aesthetic positioning of both Gretel and Muriel suggest the potential of the medium of film to comment within itself, on the problematic depiction of women through the use of aesthetics. Although the presence of Mina as the good, white witch emphasizes that the divide between women can be illustrated solely on an aesthetic level, her reinforcement of the traditional typology through her insistence that good witches don't bear the signs of the bad witches is necessary to show exactly what it is that the film is challenging. The death of Mina at the end of the film combined with the revelation that Gretel herself is a Grand White Witch further emphasize a shift in the genre towards a more complicated and less binary depiction of women, and of female relationships.

3.3 The Poisoned Apple and the Two-Bodied Grotesque: Challenging the Beauty Ideal in Versions of "Snow White"

3.3.1 The Importance of the Mirror: Identifying How Agency and Voice Can Redefine the 'Evil' Role of the Queen

Up to this point I have not looked too closely at issues of envy and anxiety in female relationships as they are depicted in the films, but "Snow White" is one tale type in which issues of beauty and female relationships are inevitably and inextricably linked. It is easy to understand this tale as the story of an older woman who, envious of a younger woman's beauty, seeks to have her killed in order to maintain her own position of beauty: when the queen hears that Snow White's beauty exceeds her own, "like weeds,

the envy and arrogance grew so dense in her heart that she no longer had any peace, day or night” (Grimm 182). Bruno Bettelheim argues that the queen’s jealousy stems from narcissism of the parent figure over her child growing up, signifying the inevitable aging of the queen (202-203). Although psychoanalytic interpretations of this tale tend to focus on the relationship between the queen and Snow White, Jack Zipes offers a different interpretation. In *The Enchanted Screen*, Zipes points out the importance of the relationship between the queen and the mirror, not as a patriarchal voice, but as a reflected voice of the queen herself: “in many ways she becomes caught in a moving film of her life as she becomes absorbed in the mirror images that deceive her into believing that she is not the most beautiful woman in the realm and must act to regain and maintain her former status” (116). In this argument, the important voice is not the voice of a powerful male, but the queen’s interpretation of a mirrored voice, which she gives power by believing what it tells her. Zipes continues on, arguing,

[a]nother way of describing her situation is that she becomes trapped in the spectacle of male illusions. Her identity and value as a woman are in large part determined by the refraction of the mirror. This is why the crucial relationship in all the tales and cinematic versions is that between the queen and the mirror, not between the queen and Snow White. If the queen had disregarded the mirror instead of gazing into it and becoming absorbed by it, her life might not have ended so tragically. (116)

Zipes argues the queen is trapped “in the spectacle of male illusions,” which suggests that her fear of not being the most beautiful woman in the land is not based on patriarchal values, but on her own interpretation of what those values are. However, this does not acknowledge the genre’s dominant favouring of youth and beauty in female characters, indicating that the queen’s fear of losing her position as the most beautiful woman is not solely indicative of the reflection of the mirror. It is more an awareness that her loss of

beauty will signify her loss of power because of the importance and rewards given to young women who possess the beauty ideal. Earlier, Zipes suggests the following:

[t]he queen's actions are determined by the mirror's representations of her as exemplifying beauty and evil, or associating evil and vanity with beauty, and these mirror representations are taken as truth by the queen. Had she perhaps doubted and cracked the mirror, cracked the meaning of the mirror, she might still be alive today. As it is, she is still dancing herself to death in red-hot shoes in some printed version of the tale. (115)

In this argument the queen, as a possessor of agency, chooses to take the mirror's reflection of herself as truth. Had the queen instead chosen to challenge the mirror, she may not have suffered the fate she did. The key issue in this interpretation becomes one of agency and of voice—who is the voice of the mirror, and does the queen possess the agency to challenge that voice? The argument that the queen chooses to obey the voice of the mirror, places her in a passive rather than active role. However, by identifying the voice of the mirror not as a refraction of the queen's voice, but as the voice of the genre itself, it becomes possible to challenge the beauty ideal and identify the power to subvert that ideal through a grotesque spectacle of the body.

3.3.2 Why the Aesthetic Subversion of the Traditional Typology Offers More Space to Challenge the Genre's Dominant Representation of Women than Narrative

Scholarship looking at the "Snow White" tale type works very strongly to challenge the assertion that beauty is not only important but vital to a woman, especially an aging woman, when she is confronted with someone younger and more beautiful than herself. Psychoanalytic scholarship challenges this from the perspective that the split between good and bad women is helpful to the child reader in exploring psychological issues associated with growing up, and is specifically gendered to explore the

development of gender role identity in children. Jack Zipes, approaching this tale from a socio-cultural perspective, offers a different interpretation, in which the problematic element is the way in which the queen herself interacts with the mirror and believes what it tells her, rather than challenging that voice. However, both of these perspectives do not acknowledge the basic fact that “receptivity to the beautiful, [and] a tendency to see and evaluate on the basis of esthetic considerations, is a general characteristic of the fairy tale” (Lüthi 1). The tale of “Snow White” is so popular in part because of its acknowledgement, in the very premise of the tale, that beauty and appearance are an important element of this genre, indicative of power and wealth. The medieval hierarchical structure of the fairy tale world is based to a large extent on appearances, and although this becomes problematic for representations of women in the tales, this is precisely why in order to challenge that beauty based hierarchy it must be done from an aesthetic perspective. The use of narration as it relates to agency in three film versions of “Snow White” can begin to illustrate why the aesthetic nature of the tales offers the largest space for subversion of those traditional elements.

The queen’s desire to maintain her position as the most beautiful woman is dealt with differently in different versions of this tale type. The degree to which she has control over her own body therefore offers an instance in the tales in which female agency and a woman’s control of the depiction of herself as image can be explored. The Disney film version of the tale, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), works to subvert the queen’s agency by giving the film itself no narrator, and by making the voice of the mirror male. Although the queen is successful in her poisoning of Snow White, this success is undermined not only by Snow White’s awakening by the prince, but also by

her lack of a voice in any other aspect of the tale. *Mirror, Mirror* (2012) uses the voice of the queen as narrator, who begins the film by saying that this is her story, not Snow White's, suggesting that the film will break with tradition and make the queen rather than Snow White the protagonist. The mirror in this version is a reflection of the queen herself, a rare occurrence in this tale type, which again suggests that this queen is different and controls the representation of herself to a higher degree than her predecessors. However, this is also the only version of the three films that does not involve the queen's ability to magically transform her physical appearance. The result of these attempts to position the queen differently in the tale end up reinforcing the traditional tale as the queen herself, through the voice of the mirror, admits at the end that "it was Snow White's story after all" (*Mirror, Mirror*). The attempted subversion of traditional fairy tale elements in this film take place primarily through the use of narration, but the visual elements used in the film continuously reinforce the traditional typology and the role of the queen as evil. The result of this is a weak narrative that is undermined by the continuous visual reinforcement of traditional fairy tale motifs, culminating in the revival of the dead king at the end of the film and a restoration of the patriarchal rule, as Snow White is married to the prince and the king takes back his throne (Fig. 7).



Figure 7: Marriage of Snow White and the Prince, *Mirror, Mirror*, 2012

Although the visual medium of film offers the potential to effectively challenge the traditional representations of women, both *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Mirror, Mirror* show how this medium can also strongly reinforce the binary depictions of women that the written tales focus on, when challenging the typology is attempted through narrative rather than visual methods.

Snow White and the Huntsman, also released in 2012 and marketed towards an older, adult audience proclaims none of the challenging of the typical fairy tale elements that *Mirror, Mirror* does. This is evident immediately, as the film begins with the huntsman narrating the well-known Grimm tale:

[o]nce upon a time, in deep winter, a queen was admiring the falling snow when she saw a rose blooming in defiance of the cold. Reaching for it she pricked her finger and three drops of blood fell. And because the red seemed so alive against the white she thought, ‘if only I had a child as white as snow, lips as red as blood, hair as black as a raven’s wing.’ (*Snow White and the Huntsman*)

This telling of the story is, almost verbatim, the same as the Grimm version. Similar to *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters*, this film begins with a re-telling of the written tale, in this case offering no narrative or visual suggestions that it intends to break with tradition.

However, as the film progresses, the visual depictions of Snow White and the Queen, the presence of the grotesque, and a careful use of spectacle create a very different film from *Mirror, Mirror* and offers a subversive and challenging element to the traditional tale, one that *Mirror, Mirror* fails to do. What this difference points to, is the power of the visual in fairy tale films to challenge elements of the genre that otherwise end up being strongly reinforced.

3.3.3 How the Association between Morality and Appearance in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is Complicated When Compared with the Grimm tale

Ironically, the queen never sees herself in her magic mirror. She does not realize how beautiful she is. There is no reflection, only the representation of a male masked face that allegedly speaks the truth. (Zipes, *The Enchanted Screen* 122)

It is problematic that Jack Zipes identifies part of the issue in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* as the queen's inability to recognize her own beauty, because it trivializes what is a much larger issue regarding power and appearance for women in the genre. Instead of being an issue with the self-perception of her own beauty, the queen acknowledges that in the hierarchy of the fairy tale world, beauty is an indicator of success for a woman and although the queen is beautiful, she recognizes the threat to her power in the younger and therefore more beautiful Snow White. The role of the gaze and the use of the grotesque to challenge the limits of the female body play an integral role in creating space within the film depictions to challenge traditional dichotomies of good, beautiful women and bad, ugly women from the written tales. Because of the visual nature of film, aesthetic depictions of the grotesque offer a potent space through which the fairy tale genre is able to challenge traditional representations of female beauty and relationships that perhaps were not as accessible in the written medium.

Through the use of the gaze in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, we see that the queen has more agency than Snow White, because she looks in an active way.



Figure 8: The skull, crow, burning candle and hour glass, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1937

The symbolic presence of the skull, crow, burning candle and an hour glass (Fig. 8) point to an awareness of the threatening presence of time for the queen, one which she confronts actively not only by positioning those items in a place where she will constantly be reminded of it, but also by making the potion and disguising herself, in order to kill Snow White. In the written tale, the queen attempts three times to trick Snow White into death, and each time Snow White falls for the trick, even after being warned by the dwarfs. There is an inability in Snow White to distance herself from the desire for beautiful objects, similar to the queen's desire to maintain her reputation as the most beautiful woman in the land. Max Lüthi argues that in the Grimm version, "Snow White violates the prohibition of the dwarfs, not, [...] out of pity for the woman who wishes to come in, but because she gives in to the desire for beautiful things" (63). The threat of

beauty and its hold over women is clearly illustrated in this tale through not only the queen, but also through Snow White, pointing to an acknowledgement that beauty is power, not only by aging and ugly women, but by beautiful women as well. In the animated Disney version, Snow White's allowance of the old queen into the house is portrayed as an act of pity, attempting in this way to morally separate the aesthetic desires of the queen with Snow White's moral attempts to be kind. This change from the written tale attempts to differentiate the desire for beauty in Snow White and the queen, but the difference highlights the significant role age plays in the desire for beauty, as what proves deadly for the queen is only a minor punishment for Snow White. However, the ability of the queen to transform her body gives her more agency in this version of the tale than *Mirror, Mirror*, which claims to change the traditional fairy tale role of the princess but ends up reinforcing the negative role of the stepmother in the process. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is limited in its exploration of this dominance of the queen in the visual realm. Although the queen's transformation from imposing beauty to ugly hag (Fig. 9) suggests a control of her body that may indicate agency,



Figure 9: The transformed queen, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1937

it acts in this animated version to maintain the association between morality and physical appearance, as she is killed at the end of the film still in this ugly form. The queen's ability to transform her body to pursue her own desires however hints at an agency in her character that *Mirror, Mirror* fails to depict.

3.3.4 *Mirror, Mirror* and Why Changing the Typology Can Still Maintain an Antagonistic Relationship between Women

In *Mirror, Mirror*, the mirror is an actual reflection of the queen (Fig. 10).



Figure 10: The Queen and her mirror, *Mirror, Mirror*, 2012

The queen complains to her reflection about a Baron's recent marriage proposal, because he is old and unattractive. The mirror, when asked by the queen for advice, says, "I am after all, merely a reflection of you. Well, not an exact reflection...I have no wrinkles," after which the mirror then tells the queen that she had better marry someone rich quickly, "because one day you will ask me who the fairest of them all is, and you won't like the answer" (*Mirror, Mirror*). These blatant remarks from a mirrored reflection of her own face immediately draw attention to something that is only alluded to in the Disney animated version—an anxiety over aging and the worry over the loss of beauty of the

queen, a worry that is exacerbated by her reflection. The significance of the queen's own reflection pointing out her wrinkles, although meant to be a funny, snide remark, instead is a poignant reflection on the pervasiveness of the beauty ideal, to such an extent that even without being told anything, this queen looks into the mirror and criticizes herself, seeing not her beauty, but the signs of aging that will mark an inevitable loss of power in the fairy tale world. If youth and beauty are prioritized, then a beautiful but aging woman is racing against time to maintain her position of power, which will eventually be given to someone younger and more beautiful than herself.

All attempts by the queen to improve her appearance are ridiculed, especially in the scene in which she gets ready for the ball, where a variety of prickly fruits, squirming insects, and tiny fish are used to enhance her appearance, the whole scene ending with a thick white liquid being dumped over her entire body as the female servants helping her seem to torture her with the treatments with a certain relish (Fig. 11).



Figure 11: The queen's beauty treatment, *Mirror, Mirror*, 2012

The queen's attempted transformation of her body in this scene becomes a spectacle to the female servants who aid and witness her methods of beautification. An antagonistic

female relationship is maintained through the servant's joy at ministering what are clearly unpleasant methods for the queen who continuously whispers to herself, "happy place, happy place" as the various treatments are used (*Mirror, Mirror*). However, there is no transformative element to the physical body with these superficial beautification treatments, and the lack of a grotesque challenging of the boundaries of the queen's body lead to a superficial attempt at transformation that ultimately fails.

3.3.5 The Delicate Balance between Beauty and Violence to Successfully Challenge the Beauty Ideal in *Snow White and the Huntsman*

It is the grotesque attempts to distort and push the boundaries of the body that are the most successful in challenging the beauty ideal, and this is shown clearly in *Snow White and the Huntsman*. Ravenna's initial attempts to maintain her beauty involve eating the heart of a bird, and submersing herself in what appears to be a milk bath (Fig. 12).



Figure 12: Ravenna in the milk bath, *Snow White and the Huntsman*, 2012

Whereas the queen in *Mirror, Mirror* is ridiculed in the scene involving a version of the milk bath, the image of Ravenna emerging from her bath coated in the milky substance

establishes an image of her as an ideal representation of beauty. Her features are represented as if in marble, and instead of ridicule, she becomes a spectacle in this scene but seems to be aware of herself in this position. This awareness of her position as spectacle prevents her attempts at beautification from being ridiculed as they are for the queen in *Mirror, Mirror*, who, unaware of her position, is easily ridiculed by her servants. Ravenna has another method of beautification that is not available to the queen in *Mirror, Mirror*, and this is where the two films diverge in their use of the visual to explore depictions of women, female beauty, and power in the fairy tale genre. In a following scene, a young girl is thrown into a dungeon but later is brought to Ravenna who observes this gift from her brother with excitement. She proceeds to suck the beauty from the young woman, who ages rapidly as Ravenna's beauty is replenished (Fig. 13).



Figure 13: Ravenna stealing a young woman's beauty, *Snow White and the Huntsman*, 2012

The scene is positioned in such a way that Ravenna becomes the observer of the woman's loss of beauty, and the focus is therefore placed not on Ravenna's transformation, but on the extent of her power in her ability to steal this young woman's youth and beauty. From this point on, the images of Ravenna continuously morph between young beauty and

aging, increasingly out of control, older woman. The constant movement between the two extremes points to the nature of her body as a site of beauty, violence, and the grotesque. As long as the mirror asserts to her that she is the most beautiful, she is happy, but the continuous threats to this power are shown in the physical expressions of anxiety that constantly transform her body. If the anxiety over a loss of beauty is suggested in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Mirror, Mirror*, then *Snow White and the Huntsman* makes this anxiety a grotesque exploration of Ravenna's body and its limits. When happy, her beauty radiates and shines as if she herself were the 'good' protagonist. However, each threat to her power is accompanied by scenes in which she looks old, weary and fragile, emphasizing the transient nature of both her body, and her beauty (Fig. 14).

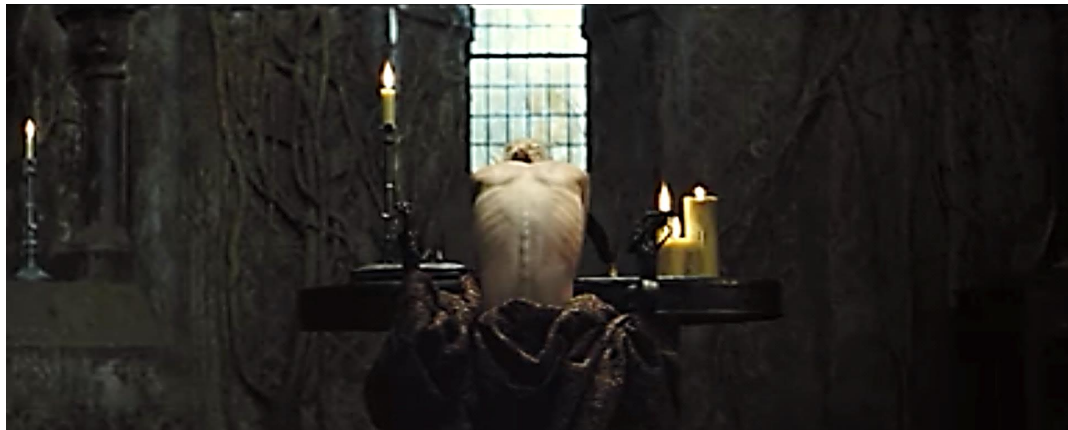


Figure 14: The threat to Ravenna's power, shown through her body, *Snow White and the Huntsman*, 2012

Ravenna's body is used to express the position of her power, and the continuous focus on both her beauty and her fragility identify the precarious position that women are placed in in the fairy tale genre, where their power is determined solely by their physical beauty.

The voice of the mirror plays an integral role in Ravenna's success and also in her demise in this film. On the day that Snow White comes of age, the mirror tells the queen, "she is the reason your powers wane," before going on to warn the queen that "her innocence and purity is all that can destroy you. But she is also your salvation Queen. Take her heart in your hand and you shall never again need to consume youth, you shall never again weaken or age" (*Snow White and the Huntsman*). This is initially presented as the voice of the mirror, asserting to Ravenna that the only way she will maintain her power is through the death of Snow White. However, further on in the film, a flashback to Ravenna's youth reveals that the voice of the mirror is actually the echo of her mother's voice. As their village is being attacked, Ravenna's mother pulls her aside while her brother looks on and tells her, "your beauty is all that can save you Ravenna. This spell will make your beauty your power and protection. By fairest blood it is done. But be warned: by fairest blood can this spell be undone" (*Snow White and the Huntsman*). Ravenna looks to the mirror for confirmation of the beauty that her mother has told her is all she will need to maintain power for herself, as well as protection. When Snow White begins to pose a threat to that beauty, it is the echoing voice of her mother that encourages her unease and anxiety over Snow White's beauty and the slowly diminishing beauty of herself. With this attempt from the film to psychologize and explain the desperate desires of the queen in this tale type to maintain her position as the most beautiful woman in the land, the film instead points out the cyclic nature of female beauty and the dynamics of female relationships that emerges from the beauty that has been characteristic of this genre since the tales of Basile and the Grimm brothers.

The presence of the grotesque offers women in this film an ability to successfully challenge the dominance of the beauty ideal in the genre. In a small village that Snow White comes across, the women have chosen to scar their faces in order to be left in peace from the queen. One woman explains to Snow White that “our scars protect us. Without beauty we are worthless to the queen. It’s a sacrifice we made, so we could raise our children in peace” (*Snow White and the Huntsman* Fig. 15).



Figure 15: The scarred village woman, *Snow White and the Huntsman*, 2012

This violent act of self-mutilation is depicted as a means of protection, and also as a means of resistance to the dominant beauty ideal and the relationships that emerge based on a conflict surrounding physical appearance for women. Although this woman describes it as a sacrifice, it can be understood as an aesthetic way to challenge the beauty ideal in the genre, and to establish a different dynamic through which female relationships can be formed, focusing less on appearance and the division of women due to anxiety and envy, and more on a sense of community between women as well as men, that does not have to be measured based on appearances. With the progressively desperate attempts of Ravenna to maintain her beauty, the self-mutilation of these women, and the portrayal of Snow White as a warrior, rather than as a helpless beautiful

maiden, this film creates a dialogue between the genre and the beauty ideal that speaks less of the vanity of women, and more of the power dynamics that have been established based on female beauty. It also points to a position for women in the fairy tale world in which value and power can be derived from a lack of conventional beauty, as the deliberate scarring of these women's faces is an act of resistance not only against Ravenna, but against the dominant beauty ideal of the genre itself.

3.4 Redefining the Gaze and Exploring the Subversive Potential of Colour as Spectacle in Versions of "Sleeping Beauty"

In her analysis of two recent fairy tale films, *The Brothers Grimm* and *Stardust*, Susan Cahill argues that in both films,

[t]he women attempt to control their representation in order that they might fit conventional ideas of feminine beauty. There is a tension in the films between an awareness of the beauty economy, in which older women must aspire toward untenable constructions of beauty, and a concomitant critique of these women who desire to control their representation. (62)

Cahill points out that these two fairy tale films explore the tension that results from the presence and awareness of the beauty ideal, and the double standard for older women, similar to Basile's "La vecchia scorticata" and the various versions of "Snow White" that criticize the older queen for wishing to maintain her beauty. The older women attempt to abide by the rules of the beauty ideal in order to maintain their power and success, but are at the same time punished for attempting to take control over the representation of themselves as an image. Mentioning Mary Ann Doane's work in *Femmes Fatales:*

Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis, Susan Cahill writes,

women in cinema who attempt to control the gaze or who actively look rather than being looked at are 'constructed as the site of an excessive and

dangerous desire,' a desire that is threatening, as it undermines the structure of representation that relies on woman as object of the gaze. (62)

The visual realm is occupied by the female battle for beauty, creating the necessity of hostile and anxious female relationships to push the plot forward. However, as Rosemary Jackson points out, the positioning of a character as evil can be established based on “a possible power to disturb the familiar and the known” (53-54). A comparison of two versions of the “Sleeping Beauty” tale type, *Sleeping Beauty* and *Maleficent*, will show that 21st century film has moved towards using that potential of the ‘evil’ character to disturb the familiar in order to challenge the dominant portrayal of female relationships in the genre.

3.4.1 The Subversive Potential of the Fairy Tale Genre: Changing the Typology and Redefining Female Relationships through Mirroring and the Gaze

Maleficent (2014) is a live-action Disney re-make of a Disney illustrated film that came out in 1959, *Sleeping Beauty*. From an aesthetic point of view, *Maleficent* differs in some very marked ways from *Sleeping Beauty* and these differences point to an awareness of the traditional dynamics between women in fairy tales, the importance placed on the beauty ideal, and an attempt to change both the tradition, and the dominance of the beauty ideal. *Maleficent* begins with the story of the young Maleficent, detailing her childhood and explaining the anger she feels towards the baby Aurora as the result of the anger and betrayal she feels when her first love Stefan cuts off her wings in order to become king. There is an attempt to psychologize the reasons behind Maleficent’s desire to harm the innocent child, in this case by attributing her anger to the hostile relationship between Maleficent and Aurora’s father, King Stefan. Once the film

reaches the point at which the Disney animated film begins, the mirroring between the two versions is significant. The celebration of Aurora's birth and the visit of the three fairies to bestow gifts of beauty and grace on the princess are almost identical from the animated version to the live action version (Fig. 16, 17).



Figure 16: The Fairies, *Sleeping Beauty*, 1959



Figure 17: The Fairies, *Maleficent*, 2014

As Maleficent enters the castle at the celebration of Aurora's birth, the scene again visually references the animated version of the tale (Fig. 18-21).

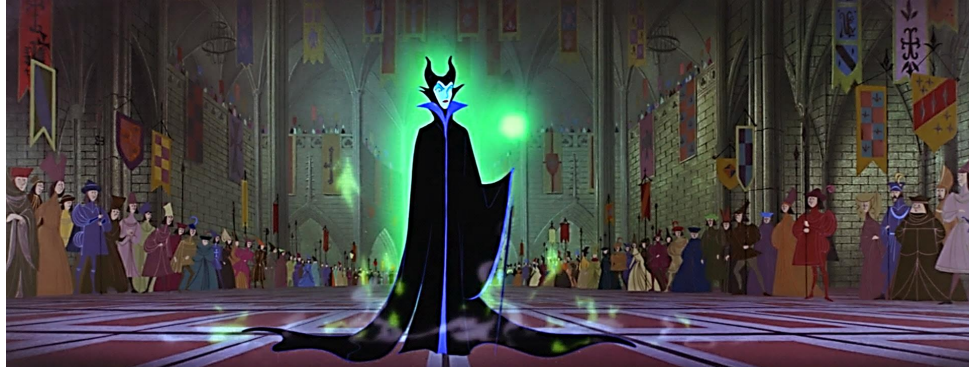


Figure 18: Maleficent's entrance, *Sleeping Beauty*, 1959



Figure 19: Maleficent's entrance, *Maleficent*, 2014



Figure 20: Maleficent casting the curse, *Sleeping Beauty*, 1959



Figure 21: Maleficent casting the curse, *Maleficent*, 2014

It is, however, at this point where the two films seem so identical, that the live action version takes a marked turn in the way it tells the rest of the story. Although Maleficent has cursed the child, she then proceeds to observe her as she grows up. In the first scene that she looks at the child after the fairies have taken Aurora to the hidden cottage, the use of the half closed window to frame Maleficent as she looks at the baby, and the baby's gaze at Maleficent, establishes a visual dialogue between these two characters who traditionally have never seen eye to eye (Fig. 22).



Figure 22: Maleficent and baby Aurora, *Maleficent*, 2014

Rather than focusing on Aurora, this film focuses on the gaze of Maleficent. There are two instances in which the object of her gaze is directly drawn attention to, both being

instances in which the film moves firmly away from the traditional typology of the tale, in order to establish a new relationship between Maleficent and Aurora that is not based in anger, envy, or greed. The first is the point at which Aurora, aware that she is being watched by Maleficent, asks her to come out. The scene takes place in the Moors during the night, and as Aurora asks her to come out, the scene becomes entirely dark, with light used only to highlight Maleficent's eyes (Fig. 23).



Figure 23: Maleficent's gaze, *Maleficent*, 2014

There is a deliberate emphasis on Maleficent's gaze, symbolic perhaps of the envious stepmother of the fairy tale genre, always observing her beautiful stepdaughter. However, whereas traditionally this gaze is steeped in envy and anxiety, here the film transforms it into something new. Maleficent argues that Aurora would be afraid of her appearance, to which Aurora responds, "I know who you are. You're my fairy godmother" (*Maleficent*). With the combination of the focus on Maleficent's gaze and Aurora's decision to identify her as her fairy godmother, the dynamic between these two women has been altered from the traditional typology. Although the viewer is aware that Aurora is under a curse that she herself is not aware of, by calling Maleficent her fairy godmother, Aurora has introduced a different way for this 'evil' fairy to be labeled.

A scene towards the end of the film, focusing on both the gaze and use of colour, makes the biggest change in the typology of this tale. As Aarne-Thompson identify the tale, “[t]he king’s daughter falls into a magic sleep. A prince breaks through the hedge surrounding the castle and disenchant the maiden” (137). The animated version follows this exactly, and the live action version begins by following the same trajectory. The kiss of Prince Phillip is filmed in a way that mimics the animated version, but with a difference in the use of colour. In *Sleeping Beauty*, Aurora lies, ‘dead,’ and this is symbolized by the dull, muted tones of her colouring, contrasted against the vibrant red of Phillip’s cape, drawing attention not to her, but to him (Fig. 24).



Figure 24: Before the spell is broken, *Sleeping Beauty*, 1959



Figure 25: After the spell is broken, *Sleeping Beauty*, 1959

It is not until he kisses her and she awakens that she regains colour (Fig. 25), pointing to the importance of marriage and the male-female relationships usually celebrated in the genre as the happy ending. The combined death of Maleficent just before this scene establishes an indirect two-bodied image, but it is one that the animated version does not pause to dwell on. In *Maleficent*, the shot of the kiss is very similar to the animated one, but colour is used only to establish realism, as opposed to spectacle, as the kiss occurs with no changes in colour, and no awakening of the princess (Fig. 26).

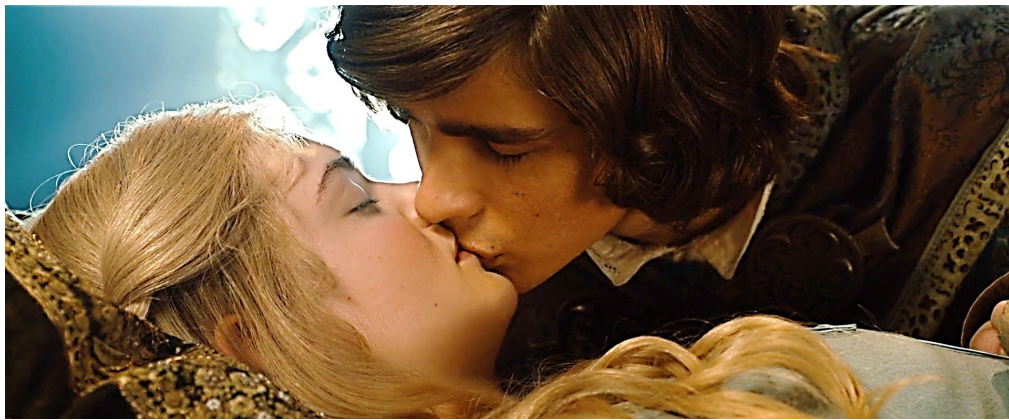


Figure 26: Trying to break the spell, *Maleficent*, 2014

Maleficent has been silently observing the exchange, one she knew would fail from the beginning, as she points out that true love's kiss does not exist, something she learned when she was betrayed by Stefan. Still she watches, hoping that the prince will be able to break the spell, which he fails to do, breaking with the typology in order to offer a new ending, and therefore a redefining of the ways in which female relationships are depicted in this genre.

3.4.2 Breaking the Cycle of Violence and the Two-Bodied Grotesque Image by Establishing a Dialogue between Old and New Versions of “Sleeping Beauty”

The use of colour in *Maleficent* primarily establishes a realistic setting, rather than to create spectacle, but the absence of colour in certain scenes, such as the one in which Maleficent’s eyes observe Aurora who asks her to reveal herself, establishes a visual dichotomy between the liveliness of the magical land of the Moors and of the human kingdom, and Maleficent. The first scene in which she is shown using a darker colouring is when the old king comes to the Moors to attack. The difference between this Maleficent, ready to fight off the king and his soldiers, and the young Maleficent we are introduced to at the beginning of the tale, is marked by the presence or absence of colour (Fig. 27, 28).

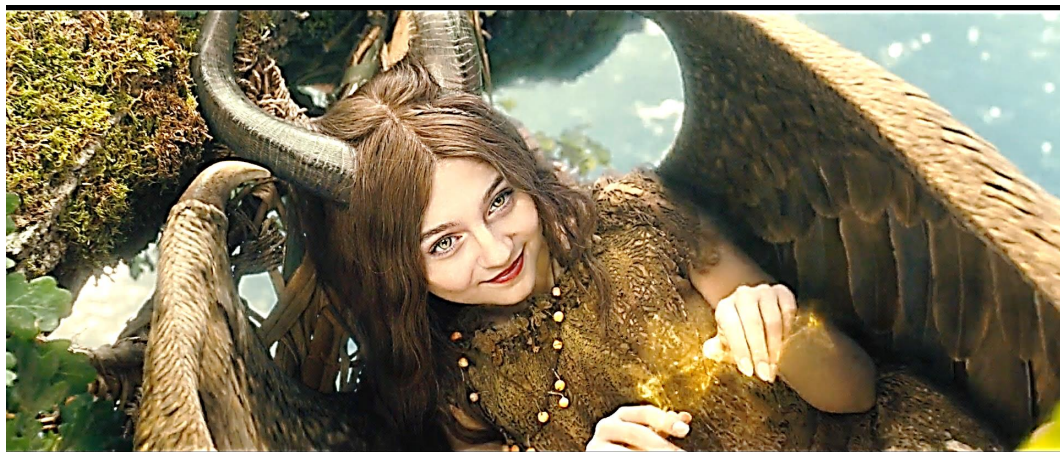


Figure 27: Young Maleficent, *Maleficent*, 2014



Figure 28: Adult Maleficent, *Maleficent*, 2014

The severing of Maleficent's wings by Stefan is the first step in her transformation towards the animated version's evil fairy, and there is a grotesque two-bodied image created between the lively young fairy and the mutilated older one. The grotesque emerges in this film through the constant presence of Maleficent's wings, even after they have been severed from her body. Stefan keeps them locked in a glass cabinet, creating a spectacle out of the violence he committed and the woman he betrayed. The grotesque still exhibits itself through the body of the 'evil' woman and the ways in which that body is challenged, but contrary to the king in "La vecchia scorticata" who punishes the old woman for deceiving him, here it is the king who is punished for deceiving Maleficent.

There is a dialogue between these two versions of the film in which *Maleficent* constantly alludes to the older animated film in a primarily visual way, even as the plot moves further away from both the animated version and the typology identified by Aarne-Thompson. This culminates with the kiss on the forehead of Maleficent to the sleeping Aurora, who then awakens (Fig. 29).



Figure 29: Breaking the spell, *Maleficent*, 2014

The breaking of the spell, not by the prince, but by the woman who cast it in the first place, creates a commentary on the traditions of the fairy tale genre regarding female relationships and envy. It offers instead a different way for women and female relationships to be portrayed that, similar to *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters* does not depend on strict binaries, but the bending of those binaries to create more realistic and accessible depictions of women. This is further emphasized through a comparison of two scenes towards the end of *Sleeping Beauty* and *Maleficent*, one in which the awakened Aurora walks into the grand hall to see her parents on the arm of Phillip (Fig. 30), and the other in which Maleficent, her wings restored, crowns Aurora as queen of both the Moors and the human kingdom beyond it (Fig. 31).

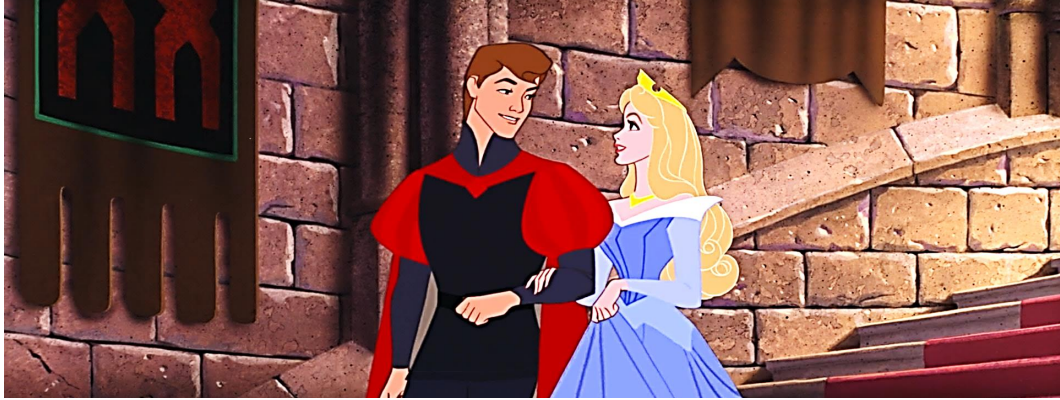


Figure 30: Awakened Aurora and Prince Phillip, *Sleeping Beauty*, 1959



Figure 31: Maleficent crowning Aurora, *Maleficent*, 2014

There is a suggestion, through these two images, of the traditional scope of the fairy tale genre in the animated version, and the potential it has within itself to morph and transform according to a different portrayal of women that is not a strict binary of good and bad, based on physical beauty. The image of Maleficent crowning Aurora, as opposed to Aurora celebrating a wedding as Maleficent is killed, creates a different narrative regarding this typology and the genre in general that focuses on friendship and forgiveness in female relationships rather than anxiety and violence.

Conclusion

That the same listener wishes to hear the same fairy tale several times—completely in contrast to the case, say, of the joke—shows that it sets in motion a pattern of internal experience, sets off a sequence of tension and relief of tension, of concentration and relaxation, similar in effect to that of a musical work, whose interest is also not exhausted by a single hearing and which one needs to hear time and again, since the effect is deepened through repeated listening. (Lüthi 73)

Summarizing the Argument

The female beauty ideal in fairy tales has been reinforced and maintained in the genre based on historical, typological, and even scholarly elements. What began as a depiction of a medieval beauty ideal, associating physical beauty with inner morality, has transformed in the genre into an aesthetic obsession with beauty and the power that comes with it. The importance of marriage and the presence of envy in female relationships also have a historical basis but have been enforced in the genre as the means through which conflict develops in the plot and the ultimate reward is presented to the most beautiful woman. Although the typology of some tales places female conflict based on physical appearance as the motivation of the plot, the use of excessive violence to punish women who attempt to gain the beauty ideal and its rewards for themselves has maintained a negative depiction of female relationships that has been reinforced regardless of time period or culture. Psychoanalytic scholarship on the issue of antagonistic female relationships, especially the well-known work of Bruno Bettelheim, has legitimized the presence of envy and violence between women by approaching the tales from the view of the child reader, further enforcing the divide between women. Envy and the dominance of a beauty ideal is not present in male relationships in the same

way, and the use of forgiveness and reconciliation is present in many tales involving male conflict, but it is never present in tales involving female conflict.

Because of the focus on appearances for female characters, the presence of anxiety as it is expressed physically through the body becomes a key element to exploring the ways in which female characters have the potential agency to challenge the dominance of the beauty ideal in the genre. Combining the images of the good, beautiful woman and the ugly, sinful woman into a two-bodied grotesque image creates a dynamic representation of women in the genre that focuses less on the divisions between the two 'types' of women, instead establishing a complicated depiction of women and female relationships that contains within itself the possibility to challenge the harsh beauty ideal. In this way, the presence of violence as punishment in the tales can be understood less as the cathartic release of anxieties for the reader of the tale, and more as the ability of the ugly female characters to challenge the dominance and importance placed on beauty in the genre. In addition to the anxiety associated with the beauty ideal and the physical expressions of that anxiety, spectacle of the female body plays a key role in exploring the ways in which the female characters of the genre might challenge the beauty ideal. The use of spectacle in the written tales is closely linked with the desire to possess or consume beauty in both female and male characters. In the tales of Basile, anxiety and reactions to physical appearance are expressed through the desire to consume food and as such beauty and ugliness are closely related to creating appetizing or gag-inducing reactions. In the Grimm tales desire is expressed through precious stones and jewels, so beauty is often equated with gold and excessive wealth, whereas ugliness is associated with anything dull, lifeless, and worthless. In terms of desire and beauty, spectacle offers

space through which the grotesque elements of the tales can be dwelled on and expanded in order to show the negative effects of the beauty ideal. These grotesque elements also offer space for the ugly characters to challenge the dominance of the beauty ideal.

Although they are never successful, their continued attempts to gain wealth and beauty for themselves points to a subversive element built into the genre that is often not talked about.

21st century films offer a different medium through which issues of female representation and the beauty ideal can be challenged in what is a very static genre. The use of visual rather than narrative elements to establish a new way of depicting women and female relationships in film through the use of colour and the gaze has allowed these films to reference the well-known tales and also show how traditional elements of the genre can be challenged and re-written. Violence and a focus on the grotesque have allowed the films to create new models for female relationships that are based less in envy regarding appearances. The acknowledgement by the films of the beauty ideal and the ways in which it has dominated the genre serve as a reference point from which the films can work to challenge what have been traditional elements of the genre.

How Expanding the Corpus Can Add to the Exploration of the Beauty Ideal

The fairy tale itself is a relatively stable genre. The established typology of the tales as identified by scholars such as Vladimir Propp as well as Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson in the 1920s can still apply to fairy tales written and adapted for modern audiences today. The framework of the genre has remained static apart from the post-modern writers who actively seek to re-work the typologies to create a dialogue between the tradition of the genre, and the potential of the genre to establish new ways of speaking

about women, relationships, and the idealization of female beauty. Authors such as Angela Carter and Robert Coover have taken popular, well-known elements of the genre and then used those elements to create a new version of the fairy tale, in which things are not as certain as the genre often makes them out to be, and things that have been accepted as static elements of the genre are instead challenged and re-written. These rewritings of the tales are shocking and different because of how well-established the pattern of the genre is, making any deviations from that pattern marked and noticeable immediately.

In this thesis I focused on two sets of written tales, those of Giambattista Basile and the Grimm brothers. I could have chosen to also include the tales of Italo Calvino, which would have created a different lens through which to approach the tales and would have offered even more in terms of the grotesque as it relates to the fairy tale genre. My attempt in choosing the authors that I did, was to explore the evolution of the more traditional fairy tales that have been popularized through modern media and in that way interpret whether by following the traditional typology of the tale, there is the possibility of challenging the static elements regarding the beauty ideal and female relationships. If I had chosen to bring in the post-modern fairy tale writings of authors such as Angela Carter and Robert Coover, I could have explored how a post-modern, written approach to the traditional tale has worked to challenge those problematic female relationships. From including these post-modern texts I could have looked at whether the dominant presence of aesthetics and the focus on the appearance of the female body and spectacle is still prevalent even in the post-modern tales, and if not, do the post-modern stories re-write the tales to such a large extent that the genre is somewhat lost? By focusing on more traditional retellings of the tales I sought to explore how the genre, maintaining the

overall typology, can with an aesthetic approach still raise questions about the beauty ideal and subvert the dominant role it plays in destroying female relationships.

Adding to the Scholarship

There is a huge amount of feminist scholarship on issues of the portrayal of women, beauty and female relationships in the fairy tale genre. I chose not to focus on this scholarship based on a desire to use an aesthetic approach to the tales. However feminist scholarship would have offered a different view point from which to approach all of the issues that I found with the genre regarding violence, the female body, and the destruction of female relationships in order to maintain the ideal of heterosexual marriage as the happy ending of the tales. A combination of research into the feminist scholarship on this genre with the post-modern re-writings of the tales would add to what I have only scratched the surface on with this thesis. By also incorporating the socio-historical approach of scholars such as Jack Zipes and Nancy Canepa, I could have used the connections between history and the context in which the tales were created to raise questions about the value and presence of women in those respective societies, and the ways in which that presence of the woman in society was depicted in the fairy tale, to control any desires that may have been perceived as undesirable by the general society, but also to explore the ways in which, through the fairy tale, society has been able to maintain a method of teaching women to appear and act in the world in very specific ways.

Closing Remarks

Every woman knows that sooner or later the mirror will tell her she is no longer the fairest in the land. When that day comes, a piece of poisoned fruit is a handy thing to have around. (Stewart, *Cathy's Ring* 16)

Years ago, reading a book that had nothing to do with fairy tales, I came across the above quote. It is striking how hugely fairy tales have been incorporated into the everyday dialogue of 21st century society. Even more so, it is intriguing that very often it is incorporated with an eye towards the ideals of beauty espoused in the genre, and the desperation of women to maintain the appearance of beauty at any cost. The presence of a multi-million dollar industry devoted strictly to cosmetics and the maintenance of a beautiful and youthful appearance in today's society points to an unease regarding aging and ugliness in the female body that, although problematic when represented in the fairy tale, is very much a part of society even today. This thesis has worked to explore the ways in which the written tales have established a specific method for depicting female relationships and the presence of the beauty ideal, and then attempted to show that the films of the 21st century have sought to challenge and change that ideal. Although a genre that is often explored for its influence on children and their development, the fairy tale can also be an indicator of society at large and the superficial values it places on women and the female body, as well as a method of challenging those entrenched values. Franz Kafka once wrote, "there are no fairy tales without bloodshed" (Bridgewater 82), highlighting the very basic fact that violence is a key element of this genre. It is with this violent aspect of the fairy tale that female characters have always attempted to challenge the limits placed on them and their bodies, in order to create a new dynamic in which ugliness and the stretching of the body's limits can become a position of liberation and power, rather than a source of fear and control.

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